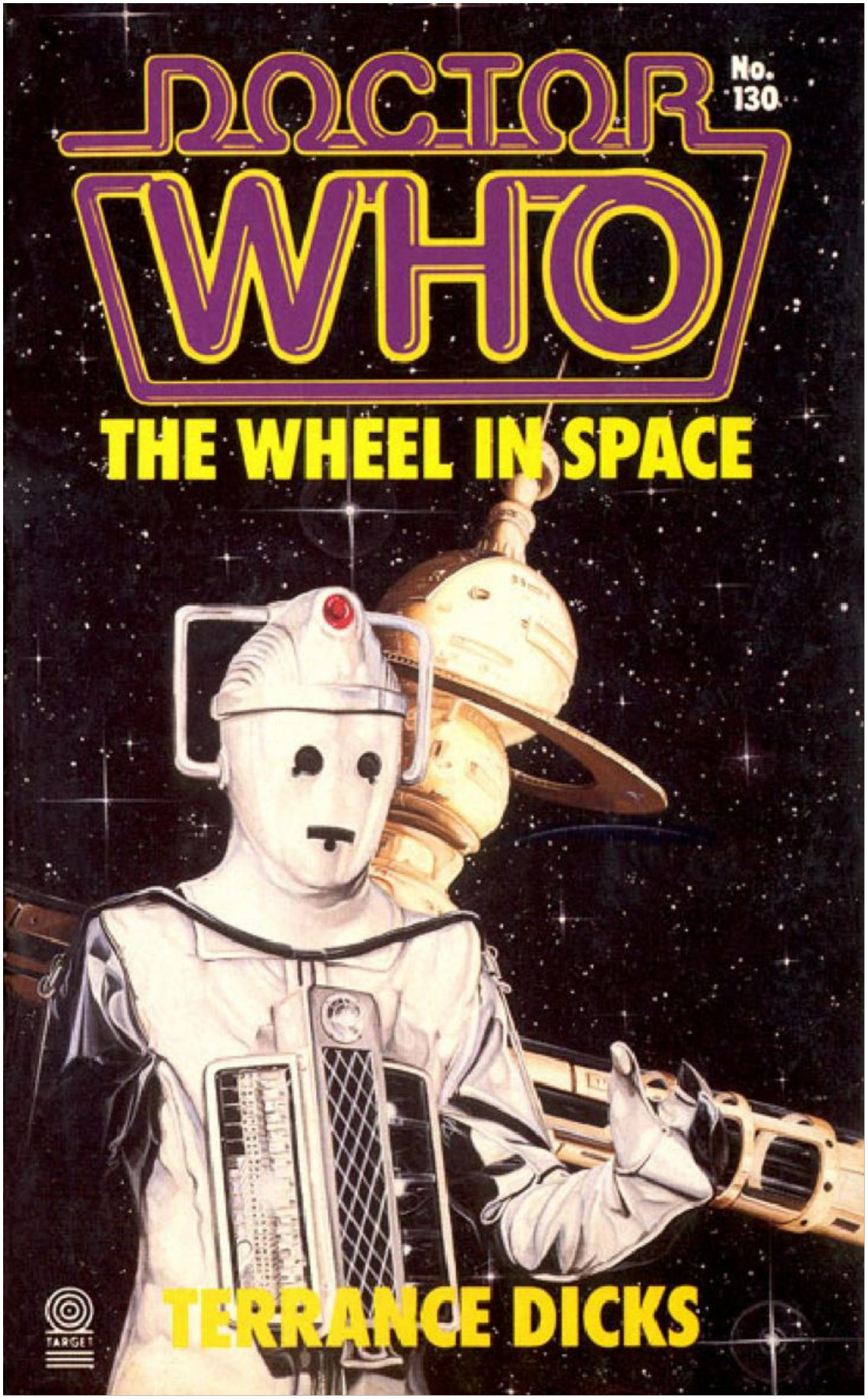
DOCTOR WHO
No. 130
THE WHEEL IN SPACE
TERRANCE DICKS
TARGET

When the TARDIS rematerialises inside a rocket the Doctor and Jamie are alarmed by the presence of a hostile Servo-Robot. They discover that the rocket is drifting in the orbit of a giant space station—the Wheel in Space.

Once inside this magnificent space ship they are bewildered by its complexity and sheer size. The technicians and programmers are highly trained, but who are they working for?

Suspecting the worst, the Doctor is still horrified to find the deadly Cybermen in control. What evil plan are they plotting? Who or what are the Cybermats? Can the Doctor trust anyone on board to help him stop the Wheel as it spins relentlessly through space?

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DOCTOR WHO

THE WHEEL IN SPACE

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TERRANCE DICKS

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Goodbye to Victoria

Victoria was waving goodbye.

She looked very small on the TARDIS's monitor screen, lost and alone on the wide stretch of empty beach.

Two very different figures stood gazing sadly at the monitor screen. One was that wandering Time Lord known as the Doctor, a rather shabby little figure in frock coat and baggy check trousers. His deeply lined face, which could look young or old, wise or foolish, was crowned with a mop of untidy black hair. Beside him stood a brawny young man in the kilt of a Scottish Highlander. This was James Robert McCrimmon - Jamie for short. Like Victoria, Jamie had been the Doctor's companion through a number of dangerous and terrifying adventures.

Now Victoria was leaving them and Jamie was taking it hard. Somehow it didn't make things any better that Victoria was leaving them of her own accord. She had had all the adventure and excitement she could take and she had decided to stay behind on Earth with a family who would be glad to adopt her as their daughter.

Somehow Jamie just couldn't accept it. 'We can't just -

leave her, Doctor.'

'We're not leaving her, Jamie. It was her decision to stay,' the Doctor said reassuringly. 'She'll be happy with the Harrises, don't worry.' .

Jamie hated showing his feelings. 'I'm no' worrying, I'm just - och, get us away from here, will ye?'

'All right,' said the Doctor obligingly. He moved over to the many-sided central control column. 'Where would you like to go?'

Theoretically, all space and time were available to them.

Theoretically.

In practice, as Jamie well knew, the combination of the TARDIS's erratic navigational circuitry and the Doctor's even more erratic steering, meant they were liable to fetch up almost anywhere - and anywhen, come to that.

But for once this suited Jamie fine. 'I couldna care less!'

The Doctor gave him a sympathetic look. 'I was fond of her too, you know, Jamie.'

His hands moved over the controls and moments later the central column of the control panel began its rise and fall.

The TARDIS was about to take off.

On the beach, the incongruous square blue shape of the police box gave out a strange wheezing, groaning sound and faded slowly away.

Victoria looked on sadly, her eyes filling with tears...

On the monitor screen her figure grew even smaller, receding into the distance.

The Doctor switched off the monitor and turned away.

It was some time later before the rising and falling of the centre column began slowing down.

The Doctor looked up from the controls. 'We're landing, Jamie!'

There was no reply.

The Doctor turned and saw Jamie fast asleep in his chair. Like the good fighting man he was, Jamie took every opportunity for a nap.

'Jamie! We're landing!'

Jamie blinked. 'Mmm? What?'

'Let's see what's on the scanner shall we?'

The Doctor switched on the screen, but it remained blank. He frowned and jiggled the switch.

Still nothing.

'I thought you said we'd landed,' said Jamie grumpily.

'We have - but we seem to have lost the picture.' The Doctor flicked another switch. 'Let's try a bit of extra power, shall we?'

Nothing happened.

'You're sure you're using the right one?' asked Jamie sceptically.

The Doctor was indignant. 'Of course I am! Just take a look at the fault indicator, will you? Just there to your right.'

Jamie opened the lid of a small black box built into the console. Inside he saw an oscillation meter, its glowing lines pulsing in a regular pattern. It meant absolutely nothing to him. 'Seems right enough,' he said hopefully.

The Doctor glanced at the meter. 'Yes, no abnormal movement at all. I don't understand it.' He checked the other dials. 'Air normal, temperature normal... seems to be quite an amount of metal all around us...'

'What's that, Doctor? I canna hear ye when you mumble to yourself.'

Suddenly the Doctor caught sight of the monitor screen.

'Look, the picture's coming through again.'

There on the monitor was a beautiful lake and as they watched a flock of cranes rose lazily from its surface and flew gracefully away.

Jamie cheered up. 'Och, that looks all right.'

The picture changed and now they were looking at a waterfall, its cascading waters gleaming in the moonlight., The Doctor frowned. 'That's funny, it's changed to night now.'

'That's a wee bit quick, surely?' muttered Jamie. The picture changed again. Now they saw a tropical island, white sands, waving palms, all set in a bright blue sea.

'Och, now the whole place is different. What's going on?'

'Oh dear, I know what it is,' said the Doctor suddenly.

'Those pictures aren't of the outside world at all, I'm certain of it!'

'Then why are they appearing?'

'Temptations, Jamie. The TARDIS is telling us to leave wherever we are and go to somewhere more pleasant. I must have connected the automatic defence network by mistake.'

'And what's that?'

'One of the optional extras built into this particular model. I don't often use it; it's a perfect nuisance to be honest.'

'What does it do?'

'Well, if there's danger outside it tries to warn us - or as in this case, to tempt us - into going somewhere else.'

‘That’s guid enough,’ said Jamie. ‘Let’s go!’

The Doctor sighed. ‘Jamie, if I took any notice of that silly gadget, we’d never even leave the TARDIS. It’s so *fussy*.

That’s why I usually disconnect it.’

‘No wonder we always end up in trouble!’

The Doctor was struggling with the switch that would turn the automatic defence network off, but it refused to budge. ‘Oh dear, now I can’t seem to move it. Where’s my spanner...?’

Jamie glanced casually at the fault indicator - its lid was still open - and his eyes widened. ‘Hey! There’s a light flashing...’ The Doctor looked. Sure enough an alarm-light was flashing wildly, and the lines on the oscillation meter were pulsing furiously. ‘Something’s gone wrong,’ said Jamie worriedly.

The Doctor wrinkled his nose and sniffed. Tracing the acrid reek to its source, he saw wisps of smoke coming from the control console. ‘There’s too much power...’ He rushed to the main power switch and tried to thrust it back. It refused to budge, and Jamie came to help him. Suddenly there was a bang and a flash and a cloud of smoke and the Doctor and Jamie were hurled across the control room. They struggled to their feet. By now it was obvious that something was badly wrong.

The central column was rising and falling rapidly, and lights were blinking on and off all over the console. The TARDIS’s usually inaudible electronic hum had turned into a steadily rising shriek.

‘The fluid links must have gone,’ muttered the Doctor.

Jamie pointed to the base of the central column. ‘Look, Doctor!’

The Doctor saw a silvery fluid leaking from the base of the column. ‘The mercury’s vaporising!’ As if to confirm his theory, Jamie coughed and clutched at his throat. ‘Doctor!’ he gasped.

Now they really were in trouble, thought the Doctor.

Mercury vapour was a deadly poison. ‘We’ve got to get out of here.’

‘How?’ croaked Jamie.

The Doctor took his arm and led him to the TARDIS

doors. He touched a concealed button and a little panel slid back in the wall. Behind it, clamped to the wall, was a golden rod, black at either end.

‘Hold on to me, Jamie,’ ordered the Doctor. ‘What are you going to do?’

‘Just hold on!’

Jamie enfolded the Doctor in a kind of awkward bear-hug, and the Doctor reached out and pulled the gold rod away from its fitting.

Jamie heard a sound like a rushing wind and the control room seemed to swirl around him. It began pulsing in and out of existence, more and more rapidly, and suddenly everything was extinguished in a blaze of light. The last thing Jamie heard was the anguished electronic howling of the console...

Jamie opened his eyes.

He was still clutching the Doctor and they were jammed together in some kind of enclosed space, somewhere small and square. The Doctor struggled free and Jamie followed him.

To his astonishment, he found himself standing outside the TARDIS. The outside was the familiar square blue shape, but glancing behind him, Jamie saw that the inside was totally different. There was no sign of the impossibly large control room - instead there was just the amount of space you'd expect to see inside. 'Doctor, what have you done? You've shrunk the TARDIS!'

The Doctor held up the golden rod. 'I disconnected the Time Vector Generator.'

What does that do?'

'It controls the size of the interior of the TARDIS

amongst other things. Once it's removed, the interior becomes an ordinary police box once again.'

Jamie looked stunned.

The Doctor closed the TARDIS doors. 'Come and sit over here, Jamie.'

For the first time, Jamie became aware of his surroundings. He was in a kind of metal cave, surrounded by massive metallic shapes. 'Where are we?'

'Oddly enough, we seem to be in the motor section of some sort of rocket.'

The Doctor led Jamie to a kind of ledge surrounding one of the vast pieces of machinery and sat him down. He himself wandered over to an instrument panel set into the wall. A row of dials was labelled 'Gravity Field Strength'.

The Doctor studied the readings. 'Yes, there's an artificial gravity system on the ship...'

'And what's that?'

'Gravity, Jamie. We shouldn't be able to stand up otherwise, we'd be floating about.'

'Oh aye?' Jamie licked his lips. 'There's no water around anywhere, is there?'

The Doctor looked round. 'Not in here, no.' He paused.

'There doesn't appear to be any movement either.'

'We're on the ground then?'

'I don't know, Jamie. Perhaps. Aha!'

The Doctor was fishing in his pockets.

'Well come on, don't keep me in suspense,' grumbled Jamie.

The Doctor fished out a crumpled paper bag. 'Have a sherbet, it'll help to quench your thirst!' The Doctor gave Jamie a sweet, took one himself and began a renewed study of their surroundings.

There was a metal door at the far end of the motor area, and the Doctor bent down and studied the floor just in front of it. Twin track marks led directly to the door.

Jamie rose and came to join him. 'That warning system of yours must have thought there was something wrong out here. But what can the danger be? Everything's so - dead in here.'

The Doctor indicated the tracks. 'Something's been here, Jamie.' He bent down and rubbed a finger across one of the track marks, and then sniffed it. 'Oil. It must have been a machine of some kind. In here fairly recently too...'

Jamie wandered up to the door and saw a button set into the wall just beside it. Impulsively he pressed it and the door slid smoothly open.

Jamie jumped back in alarm. 'Sorry, Doctor!'

But the door revealed nothing more alarming than a short section of metal corridor with yet another door at the other end. The Doctor and Jamie moved cautiously into the corridor. The Doctor noticed that the tracks led along the corridor

and up to the door ahead of them. Set into the wall at the left of the door was a bank of monitor screens with a control panel beneath them. On the right they could see the outline of two closed hatches set into the corridor wall.

The Doctor crept cautiously up to the next door and put his ear to it.

'Doctor -' began Jamie.

The Doctor waved him to silence. 'Ssh, Jamie! We don't know what may be on the other side...'

2

The Unseen Enemy

The Doctor paused for a moment, thinking hard. They couldn't just stay where they were - they'd starve apart from anything else - but he was reluctant to move ahead without knowing what might be waiting...

He turned and studied the bank of monitors, and began fiddling with the controls. 'This one? No, should be this one by rights.' One of the screens lit up.

The Doctor and Jamie studied it. There on the screen was what was obviously some kind of control room - computer banks, control consoles, a central cockpit area with chairs for the crew.

The whole place was silent - and completely empty.

Low-level maintenance lights glowed dimly here and there, but the recesses of the control room were lost in shadowy gloom. In the centre of the floor was a strangely sinister oblong shape. It looked like a metal coffin. Just to one side of it stood a big crate, also made of some metallic substance.

Jamie peered uneasily at the screen. 'Well, it *looks* safe enough...'

'But what caused the defense mechanism of the TARDIS

to signal danger? And why isn't there anyone on board?' The Doctor studied a dial set beside the control console. 'Well, there seems to be plenty of air in there. Let's take a look.' The Doctor pressed what should have been the door opening control. Nothing happened. He tried a number of other controls. They didn't work either. The Doctor glared indignantly at the door, trying to work out what to do next.

'I'll have a nose about back here,' said Jamie tactfully.

He turned and wandered back to the two hatchway doors set in the wall. There was something set into each door that looked very like a handle. Curious as ever, Jamie turned it -

and the first hatchway door slid open.

It was the door to a little cabin, three-quarters filled with variously shaped metallic containers stacked against the walls.

Jamie closed the door, went along to the next one and opened that. This door too gave on to a cabin, but the cabin was furnished with two bunks, a central table and two padded chairs, all built in.

Jamie became aware that the Doctor had come over to join him. The Doctor looked round the little cabin. 'Living quarters?'

Jamie nodded. 'Aye. Stores in the other one.'

There was some kind of machine standing upright against the far wall - a dispensing-machine, thought the Doctor. They went over to examine it.

'Hey, it says "water" on here!' said Jamie.

They began experimenting with the controls...

There was movement in the empty control room. A squat bulbous shape glided silently out of the shadows. It was a servo-robot, a simply designed affair that was little more than a metal cylinder on running tracks with bulb-like sensors on its upper surface. It was making a routine inspection.

Trundling up to the control room door the robot paused for a moment. One of its sensor-globes glowed and the door slid open. The robot moved off down the corridor.

After a lot of jiggling and fiddling, the Doctor managed to persuade the dispensing-machine to produce two plastic cups filled with ice-cold distilled water. They stood sipping the water gratefully.

Jamie looked round. ‘I’d have thought a rocket this size would have carried more than two people.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘It does. Four, I imagine; two resting, two on duty.’

He went to the cabin’s viewing hatch, which was covered by a metal shutter. The Doctor began unscrewing the clamps that held it closed.

‘The TARDIS must have gone crazy,’ said Jamie.

‘There’s nothing on board here with us, so there’s no danger!’

‘Isn’t there?’ The Doctor beckoned Jamie over to the window. ‘Come and look!’

Jamie looked. Through the viewing hatch he saw -

nothing. The infinite blackness of space.

‘We appear to be drifting aimlessly in space, Jamie.

Maybe that’s what the TARDIS was trying to warn us about.’

Jamie shrugged. ‘What does it matter?’

‘Matter!’ said the Doctor indignantly. ‘We’re just a piece of drifting space flotsam, don’t you realise that?’

‘Aye, all right then. All you have to do is replace yon rod what d’you call it, the dimension thingy...’

‘The Time Vector Generator,’ said the Doctor patiently.

‘It controls the temporal drive.’

‘Aye, that thing. You just put it back and we go on somewhere else.’

‘I’m afraid it isn’t as simple as that, Jamie, remember?

First we need mercury to replace the fluid links.’

‘Aye, well, there must be some on board here.’ Jamie was ever optimistic.

The Doctor however was still feeling vaguely uneasy.

‘Besides, what happened to the crew, Jamie? They didn’t just pop out for a little constitutional, you know!’

‘We might find that out if we get inside that control room.’

The Doctor nodded thoughtfully. ‘Perhaps, Jamie.

Perhaps.’ His mind was busy with a dozen theories - and none of them were particularly reassuring.

When the TARDIS warned of danger, it was never wrong and the Doctor felt things were happening on this ship, somewhere out of view.

‘Well, let’s start looking,’ he said, and they began their search.

They searched every inch of the motor section and the whole of the store room as well. They found stores, supplies, fuel, tools, protective clothing, space suits, any number of useful and interesting things - but not what they were looking for.

‘Not a drop of mercury anywhere,’ said the Doctor despairingly. They were back where they’d started, in the little cabin.

‘Maybe we’d better try the control room,’ suggested Jamie.

‘I think you’re right, Jamie. We’ll have a bit of a rest and try there next.’

Jamie eyed the dispensing-machine. ‘D’you think we might get food as well as water out of that thing?’

‘I can give you another sherbert.’

‘I was hoping for something a wee bit more substantial, Doctor.’

‘Right! Let’s see what we can do then.’ The Doctor went over to the machine and studied the controls. He was beginning to get the hang of it now. ‘What do you fancy, Jamie?’

‘Oh... roast beef and all the trimmings.’

‘What vegetables?’

‘Potatoes and cabbage.’

‘And you’d like a fruit salad?’

‘Aye, I would.’

The Doctor’s hands moved over the controls. ‘And I’ll have... pork chop, potatoes, carrots and... and some ice cream.’

A moment later two small paper plates emerged from the machine’s dispensing compartment. They held a selection of cubes of jelly, in different colours and sizes. The Doctor handed one to Jamie. ‘There you are, complete with gravy.’

Jamie stared down at his plate in horror. ‘Ye dinna expect me to eat this stuff, do you?’

‘Why not? I’m sure it’ll be delicious.’

Jamie looked at his plate and then at the Doctor who was already munching one of his cubes with every sign of enjoyment.

Jamie sighed. ‘I didn’t expect a five-course dinner, but this is ridiculous!’

‘It’s perfectly good, Jamie. Come on, sit down and eat up!’

Jamie sat down obediently and began munching gloomily on one of the cubes. It had a vague, faint ghost of a fruity taste, and Jamie realised he must have started on his dessert by accident. Still, what did it matter?

‘What do you think Victoria’s doing now, Doctor?’

The Doctor smiled. ‘All depends when “now” is Jamie. If I knew that I might be able to hazard a guess.’

‘Och, you know what I mean.’

‘Victoria will be all right,’ said the Doctor reassuringly.

‘She chose a good time in Earth’s history to stay in, no wars, great prosperity, a time of plenty. She’ll be happy, never fear.’

He noticed that Jamie had pushed his plate of food concentrate aside. ‘Filling, isn’t it?’

‘Aye,’ said Jamie sourly. ‘Well, what do we do now?’

‘We’ll give ourselves time to digest our food, then we’ll have a go at getting into that control room.’

‘Aye, good idea. I think I’ll just have a wee lie down.’

Yawning, Jamie stretched out on one of the bunks. ‘What do you think’s happened to the crew?’

‘I don’t know, Jamie, I wish I did. I’m inclined to suspect that there was some sort of disaster. Perhaps we shall find some clue to the answer in the control room.’

In its methodical patrol through the corridors of the space rocket, the servo-robot came to the door that the Doctor had opened some time earlier. It stood studying the open door for a moment, its sensor-globes flashing agitatedly. The door was open. It was supposed to be closed, according to the information on the robot’s built-in data bank.

Something was badly wrong.

The Doctor was staring out of the viewing port. ‘At least this ship doesn’t seem to be in any immediate danger.

However, I’d very much like to know what really happened.’

The only answer was a long rattling snore. The Doctor turned and saw that Jamie was fast asleep.

The servo-robot was standing in front of the TARDIS, its sensor-globes flashing wildly in robot astonishment. Faced with an event totally outside its programming, it was completely and utterly at a loss.

Attached to the control console in the rocket control room was a strangely alien looking device. Somehow it was clear that it was the product of a very different technological culture from the one that had originally built the ship. It was some kind of clock device with three separate hands. One revolved swiftly and silently, like the second hand on a watch.

The second made a series of sudden jumps at regular five-second intervals. The third moved less frequently, covering a whole quarter section of the dial at a time. Above the clock was a small digital register. It was currently reading one thousand and twenty-five.

The robot abandoned the problem of the TARDIS’s presence on board. Since it was impossible it could not have happened so it was not a problem.

Trundling back along the corridor, it applied itself to the problem of the open door. Passing through, it turned to face the door from the other side. It flashed its sensor-globes at the control panel and the door slid shut. The robot extruded a metal rod from the upper part of its body. Light glowed at the end of the rod, and the robot moved the laser-beam carefully around the edges of the door, sealing them shut.

Satisfied it moved back towards the control room.

Tucking a space-blanket around Jamie’s sleeping form, the Doctor straightened up and headed for the cabin door.

He had decided to let Jamie sleep, and to make the attempt to reach the control room on his own.

Just as he reached the door, he paused listening. Had there been some kind of sound from the corridor outside? A sound of movement? Cautiously he opened the cabin door and stepped out into the corridor.

Looking down he saw track marks on the floor. *Fresh* track marks, overlaying the ones he’d already seen. Yet the corridor was empty...

The Doctor moved along to the bank of monitor screens. He operated controls, but this time he got nothing but a swirl of static.

By now the servo-robot was back in the control room. It was standing next to the main computer bank, extruding a power cable from its body. The cable locked home, plugging in to a socket on the computer bank. Needles flickered, lights flashed, and the ship’s computer, with its pre-programmed automatic pilot, hummed into life.

Orders were transmitted across the ships operation circuits - and suddenly the rocket motors surged into life.

Changing direction abruptly, the ship set off on its new course...

The sudden lurching of the ship took the Doctor unawares as he was leaning forward to study the monitor controls. Hurled across the corridor, he struck his head on the steel wall and slumped unconscious to the ground.

3

Hunted

The lurch that threw the Doctor into the wall sent Jamie hurtling from his bunk. He thumped onto the floor, rolled over, and scrambled to his feet - to find the Doctor gone. He hurried out of the cabin to look for him.

At the far end of the corridor he saw the Doctor stretched out on the ground. As Jamie watched, the Doctor stirred and began making feeble attempts to get to his feet.

Jamie ran to help him. 'Doctor! What's happening?'

The Doctor groaned. 'Hit my head...'

Jamie helped him to sit up. All around them was the deep hum of machinery, the subdued roar of the rocket's motors. 'We're moving, Doctor... The rocket's moving!'

'I know...' The Doctor clasped his aching head. 'There must be someone inside the control room.'

'Let's have a look, then!'

The Doctor shook his head dazedly. 'No, Jamie, help me back to the TARDIS, that's the safest place for us.'

'But we still havena found the mercury...'

'Never mind that now... back to the TARDIS, Jamie.'

Jamie helped the Doctor to rise, half supporting him as they staggered along the corridor, heading for the spot where they'd left the TARDIS. The door that led out from the motor section was closed. Jamie stabbed at the controls, but nothing happened. He examined the edges of the door. 'It's sealed, Doctor!'

The Doctor stared blankly at him - and collapsed.

Catching him just in time, Jamie half-dragged, half-carried him back to the little cabin and laid him down on the bunk. The Doctor revived for a moment. 'Lock the door, Jamie.'

'But Doctor...'

'Lock it...' The Doctor's head fell back.

Jamie went over to the door, closed it, and operated what seemed to be a locking device. He turned back to the bunk. 'Doctor...'

But the Doctor was unconscious.

In the rocket control room, a complicated series of events was unfolding, according to a pre-determined plan.

The servo-robot had disconnected itself from the computer bank and was concerning itself with the coffin-like metal pod that occupied the centre of the control room. The robot's sensor lights flashed and the top of the pod slid open revealing rows of opaque globular objects resembling some kind of alien eggs. A hatchway opened in the rocket wall, and the metal pod slid inside it. The hatchway door closed.

In the control room the alien clock clicked down to zero

- and a strident signal sound filled the control room...

A hatchway opened on the exterior of the rocket and the alien eggs began drifting away into space, one by one... When the pod was empty the hatchway closed.

Its tasks completed, the servo-robot turned towards a monitor screen. Sensors flashed and the screen sprang into life. On it there appeared the Wheel, a giant man-

made space station, one of humanity's distant outposts in this remote part of the cosmos.

From the cabin porthole Jamie was staring in fascination at the Wheel.

It was vast, colossal, dominating what had seemed, only minutes ago, to be an empty sector of space. To Jamie's eyes it looked like a giant metal spinning top, with a saucer-like superstructure and some kind of supporting framework underneath.

So absorbed was Jamie by this astonishing sight that he failed to notice that the Doctor was sitting up on the bunk and gazing dazedly around him. He rose unsteadily and moving like someone sleepwalking, opened the door and staggered off down the corridor. By this time the Doctor was suffering from mild concussion, and he had only one idea in his head.

'Must get door open... get Jamie to safety...'

Kept moving only by sheer determination, the Doctor staggered up to the sealed door. He fished in his pocket and pulled out the black-tipped gold rod that he had taken from the TARDIS.

The Time Vector Generator was in itself a tremendously powerful energy-source - one which could be adapted in emergency to many strange uses...

The Doctor slipped the black cap from one end of the rod to reveal a fiercely-glowing tip. He pointed it like a torch, running it along the sealed edges of the door.

There was a crackle of power, and smoke drifted from the sealed edges. The Doctor re-capped the gold rod, slipped it back in his pocket. Shaking his aching head to clear it, he turned his attention to the door controls. They seemed to surge and ripple before his eyes. Shaking his head determinedly he forced his bleary eyes to focus and reached out for the controls. Then he sensed rather than heard that there was something behind him.

Slowly the Doctor turned - and found himself facing the servo-robot.

As the Doctor turned the robot shot back several feet -

almost as if it was frightened of the Doctor. Then it extruded the nozzle of the laser-gun from its body. The Doctor was not part of the Plan. He was an error. Errors must be erased.

Recovering from his astonished reaction to the Wheel at last, Jamie turned to the Doctor. 'Hey Doctor, come and look

-' But the Doctor was gone. The crumpled space blanket trailed from the end of the bunk and the door stood open.

Snatching up the blanket - he had a confused idea that the Doctor ought to be kept warm - Jamie shot out of the cabin and into the corridor...

He dashed along it, arriving just in time to see the confused, half-conscious Doctor being menaced by the robot's laser gun. Jamie acted instantly.

Draping the blanket over the servo-robot's squat form, he gave the robot a powerful shove that sent it shooting down the corridor. Grabbing the Doctor by the shoulders, Jamie ran him back down the corridor into the comparative safety of the cabin, closing and locking the door behind them.

To do this he had to let go of the Doctor, who slid quietly to the floor, completely unconscious...

A blast of the servo-robot's laser sent the blanket shooting into the air in charred and tattered fragments. The robot glided swiftly down the corridor after the Doctor and Jamie, coming to a halt outside the locked cabin door...

The nozzle of the laser-gun glowed fiercely, and smoke began rising from the metal door...

As Jamie heaved the Doctor back on to the bunk a fierce crackle of energy came from the direction of the door. Jamie looked and saw smoke rising and a pin-point hole that was growing steadily larger.

The Doctor opened his eyes and saw what was happening. Fumbling in his pocket he took out the gold rod and thrust it into Jamie's hand. 'Use it like a torch, Jamie...

burn... be careful... careful...' The Doctor gestured feebly towards the door - the hole was much bigger now.

In the corridor, the servo-robot had already melted away a sizeable patch of the metal door - there was a puddle of molten metal at its feet. Soon the door would be melted and the two mistakes could be erased.

Obeying the Doctor's feebly muttered instructions, Jamie took the end off the gold rod and directed the energy-beam through the hole in the door. The beam struck the servo-robot in the centre of its mid-section.

Results were immediate and spectacular. The robot shot backwards at enormous speed, smashed into the still closed door and blew up, disintegrating into smoking metallic fragments.

Jamie settled the Doctor on the bunk and found another blanket to cover him. 'We seem to be safe for a little while. But no more gallivanting about, Doctor.'

Exhausted by his efforts, the Doctor was dead to the world. Jamie settled him as comfortably as he could and then went over to the porthole, looking out at the gleaming shape of the Wheel. There had to be people on a thing like that, he thought. Maybe they would come and help...

The control room of the Wheel was very different from that of the rocket. It was huge and brightly lit, with a big semi-circular control station with places for all the crew members.

Leo Ryan sat in the command chair, a big, handsome fair-haired giant of a man, cheerful and confident, sometimes to the point of arrogance. Next to him was Tanya Lernov, a slim attractive young woman with a bell of fair hair framing her sensitive face. Standing behind them was Gemma Corwyn, medical officer of the Wheel, a pleasant-looking sensible woman in her mid-thirties.

'Hold it steady,' snapped Ryan. 'Get a proper fix on that thing!'

Gemma said mildly, 'It seems to have stopped moving.'

Ryan glanced at Tanya. 'How is it now, Tanya?'

'Stable. Exactly the same.'

Gemma said, 'Isn't there a slight drift still?'

Ryan shook his head. 'No. The movement's not real. It's an illusion caused by slight polar precession.'

A stocky, balding bearded man came into the control room and there was an immediate respectful silence.

This was Jarvis Bennett, Commander of the Wheel.

Dressed like his subordinates, in quilted black and white space coveralls, he was in his own quiet way a figure of considerable authority. 'Well, how's our mystery rocket?'

Gemma shrugged. 'Suddenly lifeless, apparently.'

Ryan frowned. He hated mysteries. 'It doesn't make sense, Commander. It must have been driven by *something*.'

'There's been no radio contact at all,' added Gemma.

Jarvis Bennett said, 'I'm not surprised. I've just checked out its description on the Register. It's a Phoenix Mark Four, named Silver Carrier.'

'Register even,' said Tanya. 'No crossover reading.'

Ryan said, 'It's definitely stopped moving. No momentum at all now.'

Gemma looked at Jarvis Bennett. 'Silver Carrier, you said?'

'That's right. Supply ship for Station Five. It was reported overdue about nine weeks ago. It's only about ninety million miles off course.'

Ryan glanced towards the dark, silent man at a nearby sub-console. 'Try radio contact again, Rico.'

Enrico Casali was the Wheel's communications officer.

Olive-skinned, brown-eyed and curly-haired, his appearance, like his name reflected his Italian origins, though there was no trace of accent in his voice. 'Space Station Three to Silver Carrier. Station Three to Silver Carrier. Come in please.

Come in please.'

'Ninety million miles?' said Gemma. 'It couldn't have drifted all that way, Commander.'

'No, it couldn't.'

'Try the emergency channel, Leo,' suggested Tanya.

Ryan leaned forward to his console mike. 'Station Three to Silver Carrier. Operate red band switch for emergency transmission.' They all waited tensely, but there was no reply.

Gemma Corwyn said, 'Maybe their radio's dead.'

'We have to try,' said Tanya.

Jarvis Bennett nodded approvingly. 'Standard procedure. I'm afraid we're wasting time, but waste it we must.'

'Any reaction, Tanya?' asked Ryan.

'No, nothing. No response at all.'

'So how does the Silver Carrier turn up in this part of the cosmos?' mused Gemma.

Jarvis Bennett said thoughtfully, 'Say something happens to the crew, illness or accident. One of them manages to put on the automatic pilot. The rocket's travelled so far by now the power feed-back is probably failing. So the rocket could start up and stop again more or less any time.'

'And what about the crew?' asked Gemma. 'Do you think they're still alive?'

Jarvis Bennett looked at Ryan, who shook his head.

'We've tried everything, sir. Can't raise a thing.' Jarvis Bennett said, 'If I'm right about that faulty automatic system, that rocket could accelerate at any moment

- and whip straight towards us. And there can't be any life on board after all this time - can there?'

Like soap bubbles from the bubble pipe of a child, the alien eggs drifted through the space between the rocket and the Wheel...

As the eggs struck the surface of the Wheel, they seemed to sink right through it, as if somehow the Wheel was absorbing them.

Tanya looked up from her instruments with a frown.

'I'm getting some kind of reading. Like very small meteorites hitting our outer rim. No damage, but there's a very slight drop in air pressure.'

'Can't be meteorites, surely,' said Gemma. 'We'd have had some warning.'

'Well, there's something,' said Tanya. 'These readings are jumping all over the place.'

Jarvis Bennett had the explanation. 'I imagine minor objects, with small mass and high density, have escaped from the Silver Carrier.'

'In that case,' said Gemma, 'such objects would be clinging close to the rocket, not descending on us.'

Jarvis Bennett didn't care for having the flaws in his theories pointed out. 'It really doesn't matter, Gemma, let's not start looking for mysteries. The point is, I daren't risk that rocket homing in on the Station and smashing into us.'

'So what are you going to do?'

Jarvis Bennett smiled. 'You're about to experience something rarely seen by human beings. Is the laser projector on standby, Leo?'

'Yes, sir. Moving into position now.'

As the rumble of heavy machinery filled the control room Jarvis Bennett said, 'I'm going to turn our laser-cannon on the Silver Carrier. In a few moments you will see the complete destruction of a rocket in space.'

From the cabin in the rocket, Jamie stared out at the Wheel. He glanced briefly at the still unconscious Doctor.

Surely the people on that thing would see them and send help...

Unaware that is was preparing to blast him from existence, Jamie stared hopefully out at the Wheel...

4

Command Decision

As Jamie watched, a hatch slid back on the upper part of the Wheel and a massive metal tube slid slowly into view.

Jamie looked thoughtfully at it. His knowledge of space technology was patchy to say the least, but his fighting-man's instinct knew a weapon when he saw one. This thing looked unpleasantly like the muzzle of a gun. And it seemed to be pointing straight towards him...

In a sectioned-off area of the control room, Bill Duggan a thick-set, amiable-looking defence officer was supervising Laleham and Vallance, two technicians who were preparing the laser-cannon for operation.

Jarvis Bennett stood watching them. 'Got the range, Bill?'

'Locked on now, sir.'

'That's the idea. Don't get much fun, do we Bill? Better make the most of it!'

Bill Duggan grinned. 'Makes a change from blasting the occasional meteorite, sir.'

Jarvis Bennett nodded. 'Tanya? How about taking a visual recording?'

'Can do, sir.'

'Right. I'd better make a crew announcement.'

Gemma Corwyn hurried over to him. 'Could I have a word first, Jarvis? It's important.'

Glancing across the control room, Jarvis Bennett caught Leo Ryan's eye and smiled. 'More bogies,' he said in a stage whisper. But he allowed Gemma to take his arm and lead him aside.

Tanya Lernov looked at Ryan and snapped, 'I don't know what you're grinning about!'

Hurriedly Ryan straightened his face. 'Neither do I.'

'This isn't funny, Leo. The Commander's so keen to use the laser, he's like a kid with a new toy.'

'Don't say you agree with old stick-in-the-mud Gemma Corwyn?'

'Doctor Corwyn isn't old and she's no stick-in-the-mud either. She's quite right to be cautious.'

'Oh come on, Tanya,' said Ryan wearily. 'That rocket is nine weeks overdue and ninety million miles off course.

There can't possibly be anyone alive on board...'

Jamie's instincts had led him to an almost uncannily accurate estimate of the situation. For some reason, the Wheel had decided that the rocket was a danger to it, and it was going to destroy the intruder.

His only hope was to make some kind of signal. He tried to wrench a light panel from the wall, but with no success.

The light wouldn't be bright enough anyway. Jamie looked desperately at the Doctor, hoping he would be recovered enough to give some advice.

The Doctor was still unconscious - but the gold rod was lying beside him on the bunk.

Well, it had worked a treat on the robot, thought Jamie.

It was worth a try.

Since she believed that rows between senior personnel were best held in private, Gemma Corwyn had taken the Commander back to her living quarters.

Much larger and more luxurious than the cramped living quarters on the rocket, Gemma's rooms were soothingly decorated in pastel shades. She was the Wheel's psychiatrist as well as medical officer, and her quarters doubled as her consulting room.

Jarvis Bennett had a nasty suspicion that he was being viewed as a potential patient.

'Don't subject me to your psychoanalysis,' he roared.

'You think I'm acting like a kid again don't you? Bang, bang, blow up the balloon! Well, you're wrong!'

'Am I?'

'The Silver Carrier is a menace to the Wheel.'

'Only if you equate menace with automatic power drive, which I don't. You want me to believe some emergency occurred on the Silver Carrier, the pilot switched over to automatic, then - tragedy. Is that it, Jarvis?'

'Right!'

'And the crew are all dead?'

'Right again!'

'Where was the Silver Carrier bound for?'

'I told you, it was servicing Station Five.'

'Then wouldn't the automatic have taken it to Station Five?' asked Gemma triumphantly.

Jarvis Bennett stared at her. 'That's good reasoning. But the emergency might well have damaged the control sensors -

which would explain why the rocket went off course.'

'Assumptions, Jarvis. Guesswork. It would be so easy to check.'

'We can't risk that rocket crashing into the station,' said Jarvis obstinately. 'She'd blast a hole right through us.'

Jamie stood hesitating by the porthole, the gold rod in his hand. If the Wheel interpreted his signal as an attack. Still, something had to be done.

Aiming the gold rod at the Wheel, Jamie whipped the black tip off one end - seconds later he replaced it.

Tearing the earphone from his head, Enrico Casali staggered back from the console. Rudkin, a neighbouring technician did the same.

Ryan ran over to them. 'What is it, Enrico?'

'Some kind of power surge... static, noise. Tremendous noise! Right through me like a knife. Swamped everything...'

All over the control room, astonished technicians were cursing and rubbing their ears. Lights were flashing wildly on all the consoles.

Bill Duggan shouted, 'What's going on? The whole system's gone crazy!'

'Tanya, get Doctor Corwyn,' ordered Ryan.

'The internal communications are out.' Tanya jumped up. 'I'll go and get her.'

Ryan went over to help Enrico, who was easing Rudkin, much more badly affected than he was himself, away from the controls.

'All right, Rudkin,' Enrico said soothingly.

'Lie him down over here,' said Ryan.

They settled the unfortunate Rudkin, who was still moaning and clasping his ears, on a bench at the side of the control room.

Enrico massaged his ears. 'I don't want to go through that again...'

'Listen!' said Ryan.

The energy pulse could still be distinctly heard, coming through the sets of ripped-off headphones. It was coming in a steady, but uneven beat - like some kind of signal.

'Don't argue with me, Gemma,' shouted Jarvis Bennett.

'The decision is mine. I command this Station and all the people in it.'

The door was flung open and Tanya dashed in. 'Doctor Corwyn, Rudkin's hurt.'

'What happened?'

'Colossal static pulses, swamping all the detectors.'

Jarvis Bennett glared angrily at Gemma. 'I knew that rocket was a menace!'

They hurried from the room.

Unaware of the havoc he was causing, Jamie stood by the rocket porthole, capping and uncapping the gold rod at irregular intervals.

Tanya, Gemma and Jarvis Bennett came back into the control room at a run.

'Tanya, you get back to your console,' ordered Jarvis Bennett. 'See if you can pin this static down. Gemma, see what you can do for Rudkin and the others.'

As Gemma began organising the transfer of Rudkin and the worst-hit of the other technicians to the medical bay, Jarvis took his seat at the console. 'All right, Leo, that rocket's given us more than enough trouble. Knock it out!'

'Commander!' called Tanya urgently.

'Yes, what is it?'

'That static - it's a signal.'

'It can't be!'

Leo Ryan held up his hand. 'She's right, sir. Listen!'

They listened.

It was quite clear that the irregular beat of the static was forming some kind of pattern.

'Get me a fix on it, Tanya,' snapped Ryan.

'If I can. It's no code I've ever heard of, but there's definitely a repetitive order to it.'

'You think it's coming from the rocket?' asked Jarvis Bennett.

'I just want to make sure, Commander.'

Tanya looked up. 'The rocket it is, sir. There's no doubt.'

Jarvis Bennett was a good enough commander to admit it when he was wrong. 'Then there's someone on board that thing. Leo, I want two men to cross over.'

'Right, sir.'

Jarvis Bennett shook his head unbelievingly. ‘Ninety million miles off course. If anyone is still alive on that ship, they must be in a pretty bad way...’

Jamie had given up on his signalling by now, and was staring down at the still unconscious Doctor in despair.

Suddenly he heard a tapping from the porthole. Swinging round he was shocked to see a helmeted head peering at him from outside the rocket.

Then realising that the longed-for help had arrived, Jamie grinned broadly and waved. The helmeted figure pointed towards the front of the rocket. Jamie nodded and hurried from the cabin.

As he hurried along the corridor, he stepped gingerly over the shattered remains of the servo-robot, then made his way towards the control room.

As he reached the door it opened before him and he went inside. One space-suited figure was already there, and seconds later, a second emerged from the airlock.

‘Quick!’ shouted Jamie urgently. ‘I’ve got someone hurt back there.’

The two space-suited figures hurried after him.

It was some time later and for the moment the Wheel seemed almost back to normal.

Ryan and the other technicians were acting as deep space traffic controllers and weather men, confirming the routes of space freighters, issuing warnings of meteor showers and generally smoothing the complex process of interplanetary travel.

Leo Ryan looked up as Tanya came into the control room. ‘How are our guests?’

‘Doctor Corwyn’s looking after them now. They both seem to be in shock.’

‘What happened to them?’

‘Nobody knows. It’s still a mystery.’

Ryan grinned. ‘Jarvis won’t like that.’ Something on one of the read-out screens caught his attention. ‘What’s that interference on Green System, Chang?’

The technician looked up. ‘It’s very odd, sir. Been getting funny signs here and there for some time. As soon as you check them out - they vanish!’

‘You’ve been logging them?’

‘Yes, sir.’ Chang frowned. ‘It’s as if we had magnets touching the outer skin of the Wheel then letting go again.

Localised field effects, that’s all.’

His co-technician, a massive Irishman called Flanagan said, ‘But all field detectors check out normal, sir. Can’t be anything serious.’

Ryan nodded. ‘Keep logging it - and keep me up-to-date.’ He smiled at Tanya. ‘More mysteries.’

Tanya didn’t return the smile. ‘I know. And what about those sudden drops in air pressure? Small enough and they soon adjusted themselves - but I still don’t like it.

‘How small?’

‘One degree - sometimes one-and-a-half.’

Ryan shrugged. ‘Could be a minor fault in the air supply pumps.’

‘In so many different parts of the Wheel?’

‘Did you tell the Commander?’

‘Of course. And he bit my head off.’

Ryan nodded sympathetically. ‘That figures. Did you tell Doctor Corwyn?’

‘Not yet. She’s busy with the new arrivals. I didn’t like to disturb her.’

Ryan said seriously, ‘I’d start a check on the whole air supply system if I were you, Tanya.’

‘I already have. Leo?’

‘What?’

‘All these mysteries. The temporary faults in your systems, the air pressure drops. They all started with the rocket, didn’t they?’

Ryan chuckled. ‘Reckon there are little green men on board, do you?’

But Tanya didn’t smile. ‘What about those two people they brought back from the rocket?’ she asked. ‘They weren’t exactly normal.’

‘I tell you what, Tanya - if you get scared I’ll let you hold my hand, okay?’

He gave her one of his cheeky grins, and Tanya couldn’t help smiling in return. ‘Leo, I’m serious.’ Ryan raised his eyebrows. ‘So am I!’

Meanwhile, outside the Wheel, a string of silvery bubbles drifted onto the outer skin then disappeared, somehow seeming to pass through the metal.

The long-prepared invasion had begun.

5

Under Suspicion

Jamie was sitting uneasily in the medical bay, stripped to the waist. Gemma Corwyn was passing a stethoscope-like instrument over his chest.

'Breathe in... out. Now a deep breath and let it out slowly.'

Meekly Jamie obeyed.

'Good,' said Gemma Corwyn crisply. 'You can get dressed now.'

Jamie rose and began struggling into his shirt. 'How's the Doctor?'

'Well, he's certainly suffering from concussion. I'm waiting for X-rays to see if there's a fracture.' She paused.

'Look, your clothes... fancy dress or something?'

Jamie was stung. 'Have you thought what you'd look like if you walked down the street in those clothes-people might think *you* were a wee bit strange!'

'But we're in space - you're the ones who aren't conforming.'

Jamie changed the subject. 'How about the medical. Do I pass?'

'If it's any comfort, you're in excellent physical shape.

What's your full name?'

'James Robert McCrimmon - Jamie for short.'

'And your friend?'

'The Doctor?'

'I can't just put that down.'

Jamie glanced round for inspiration. 'Er, Smith. John Smith.'

As she fitted the stethoscope back into the diagnostic machine and lifted the whole thing back into its container, she noticed the name on the open lid. 'John Smith and Co.

London'.

Jamie followed her gaze. 'Er - there's a lot of them about.'

'Yes indeed,' said Doctor Corwyn drily. 'You and your friend were passengers - on the Silver Carrier?'

'What? Oh, aye, we were. Could I have a drink of water, please?'

Gemma went to a dispensing-machine and returned with the usual plastic cup of distilled chilled water. She handed it to Jamie who took a couple of sips and put down the cup. 'What happened to the crew?' she asked.

'I dinna ken.' Jamie swallowed hard, desperately wishing the Doctor was here. He could talk his way out of anything. Jamie floundered on. 'I was ill in my cabin, terrible raging fever. I was raving for days. When I got up there was no one about, the doors were closed against us and the Doctor was hurt... Then your people came and rescued us.'

'Your friend couldn't tell you what had happened?' 'No.

He was too ill.'

'All right, Jamie, that will do for now. The Commander will want to have a chat with you - and of course we must see about getting you home.'

'Home. That'll be the day,' said Jamie wryly, thinking of the Scotland of 1746. He'd no chance of reaching that without the Doctor - precious little with him, he sometimes thought.

Jamie became aware that Doctor Corwyn was staring at him and said hurriedly, ‘Aye home. Yes, of course.’

‘There’s another ship passing through in a week or two.’

Jamie pulled on his jacket and began knotting his scarf.

‘Can I go now?’

Gemma was still looking curiously at him. ‘You haven’t finished your water.’

‘No, well, that’s all right...’ Jamie began edging away.

‘Would you like to see round the Wheel?’ asked Gemma suddenly. ‘I could arrange it for you.’

‘Aye, why not - nothing else to do,’ said Jamie rather ungraciously.

Gemma Corwyn pointed. ‘If you go through that door and along the corridor you’ll find a door marked Parapsychology Library.’

‘Parawhat?’

‘It’s on the far side of the Wheel, about eight sections on.

I’ll ask Zoe to show you around.’

‘Zoe?’

‘She’s our - well, you might call her our librarian.’

‘Right, fine,’ said Jamie. ‘You’ll let me know how the Doctor gets on?’

‘Of course.’

Jamie nodded and hurried away.

Gemma Corwyn picked up a mike from a nearby console. ‘Doctor Corwyn calling Parapsychology.’

After a moment a young girl’s face appeared on a monitor screen. ‘Library. What reference do you require, Doctor Corwyn?’

‘No reference, thank you Zoe. I need your help in another way. One of the people retrieved from the rocket is coming to see you. I want you to show him over the Wheel -

and observe him. Discreetly, of course.’

‘Do you wish these observations recorded?’

‘Yes please, Zoe.’

‘Right,’ said the girl briskly. ‘Should be interesting. Any other facts known?’

Gemma Corwyn smiled. ‘Well, he’s a nice lad. His name is -’

‘Just a minute,’ interrupted Zoe. ‘I was half-way through a RNA analysis, just let me clear my head...’ She clicked her tongue, shook her head then smiled. ‘Right, fire away!’

It took Jamie quite some time to find the Parapsychology Library, but he managed it at last and tapped hesitantly on the door. It opened immediately. Jamie stepped through and it closed behind him.

He found himself in a small completely bare room, in the centre of which was a semi-circular desk, also completely bare. Behind the desk sat a very small girl, or rather young woman. She wore the same black and white coverall outfit as everyone else on the Wheel and her appealing rather pixie-like face was framed with shortish black hair.

She was rattling something off into the microphone of the video-link built into the otherwise empty desk. ‘... with the exception of the Hercules cluster. Computation

shows that one of the stars in the Messier Thirteen group is entering a nova phase - information on gamma radiation level is available...'

The girl broke off as Jamie came in. 'You must be James Robert McCrimm -' She stopped again, with a little gurgle of laughter.

'Aye, McCrimmon,' completed Jamie. 'What are you laughing at?'

The girl was looking at the kilt that swung round Jamie's brawny knees. 'You're wearing female clothes!'

'Female!' Jamie was outraged. 'This is a kilt. Have you no' seen one before?'

'Kilt?' She frowned and closed her eyes, as if calling up the information. '"Kilt: a primitive form of garment, worn by a kiltie." Are you of Scandinavian origin?'

'No I am not. I'm a true bred Scot!'

'Ah, Scot - Scotland. Pre-century history isn't really my field.'

Jamie had had quite enough of being patronised by some bossy wee girl. 'Mebbe not - but you'd better not give me any more of your Sassenach lip, or I'll bend you over my knee and larrup you!'

The girl looked at him with delighted amusement. 'Oh this is going to be fun - I can learn a great deal from you, James Robert McCrimmon. Come on, I'll show you round.

My name's Zoe, by the way...'

Some time later, Jamie was feeling tired and more than a little dazed. He had seen the generator area, the computer section, the astro-navigational guidance complex, the space meteorology area, and a whole lot more, and his guide, the wee girl Zoe seemed to know absolutely everything about everywhere they'd seen.

Impressed and amused by her enthusiasm, Jamie had done his best to look interested, but he couldn't help thinking how much more the Doctor would have got out of the tour.

Now at last they were somewhere Jamie could take an interest in - a sort of mini greenhouse which their host, a stocky, cheerful fair-haired man called Bill Duggan had set up in the Wheel's main power room.

The rows of exotic alien plants in their carefully laid-out growing trays made a strange contrast to the gleaming technological environment all around them.

'This is my little kingdom,' said Bill Duggan proudly.

'How do you like my greenhouse?'

Jamie nodded appreciatively. 'Just fine. Where do you collect all these things?'

'Floating seeds, most of them. The only place they seem to flourish is down here in the power room. The Commander kicked up a dust storm at first, but Doc Corwyn said it was good therapy or something - me, I just like flowers.' Lovingly he stroked the petals of an exotic black and scarlet blossom.

'This one comes from Venus. Imagine that, all those millions of miles away!'

'Twenty-four million, five hundred and sixty-four thousand miles at perihelion, one hundred and sixty-three million three hundred and fifty thousand at aphelion...' Zoe rattled off the information as if someone had touched the read-out button on a computer.

'Aye, thanks,' said Jamie. 'I was just dying to know!'

Bill Duggan grinned and led them into the main body of the room. ‘This is the capacitator bank for the laser-cannon, Jamie. Without it the gun’s useless.’ He indicated a massive central installation, shaped rather like a giant mushroom, its transparent dome crammed with complex electronic circuitry.

Jamie studied it respectfully. ‘What do you need a cannon for, out here in space?’

Duggan shrugged. ‘Self-defence - we can blot out any attackers for ten thousand miles in any direction!’

‘Reassuring,’ said Jamie drily.

Bill pointed to another similar installation. ‘Anti-magnetic field generators over there. They fend off even medium-sized meteorites for up to five miles.’

Jamie turned to Zoe. ‘The Doctor will be verra keen to see all this!’

‘This Doctor friend of yours,’ asked Zoe curiously. ‘Is he a scientist?’

‘Aye.’

‘What’s his speciality? Is he a physicist, bio-chemist, astronomer, bio-metrician...’

‘Aye,’ said Jamie. ‘That’s right!’

‘He sounds an interesting character,’ said Bill Duggan.

‘When’s he going to be up and about?’

Jamie sighed. ‘I wish I knew...’

The Commander was asking Doctor Corwyn exactly the same question.

She looked thoughtful. ‘Well, if the concussion’s not too serious, before very long.’

Jarvis Bennett wasn’t happy with her answer. ‘That doesn’t tell me much. I want some facts.’

‘I don’t blame you.’

‘Landed with a couple of strays,’ grumbled Jarvis. ‘All these mystery panics from the crew. Routine’s getting shoddy, I don’t like it.’

‘What panics?’

‘Mysterious untraceable faults, air presure drops.

Nothing serious. People are getting edgy.’ He strode restlessly about the consulting room. ‘Out in space people need routine, ordinariness. Confuse them and you get trouble.’

Gemma Corwyn watched him thoughtfully, thinking that it was his own feelings that he was really expressing.

As if sensing her thoughts Jarvis said hurriedly. ‘Of course I’m used to emergencies, trained to cope. But all this nonsense...’

‘What you call mysteries, panics...’

‘Exactly! I don’t want to know, Gemma!’

And that was the literal truth, thought Gemma Corwyn.

Jarvis Bennett was a man for procedures, routines. The unknown would always be his greatest fear.

‘Do you want to hear my preliminary report on the boy Jamie?’

‘All right, go on.’

‘He’s lying. Not completely, and apparently reluctantly.

He's very fit, mentally and physically, with a nice constructive personality. His blood pressure suggests he hasn't been long in space.'

'What has he lied about?'

'He said he'd had fever on the Silver Carrier, but he hadn't - his blood shows no trace of it.'

'But why lie about that?'

'I asked him to explain what had happened to the crew -

fever was his excuse for not knowing. I think he lied about his companion's name - John Smith.'

'Well, they do exist, you know!'

Gemma showed him the label on the diagnostic machine. 'He was looking at this at the time. Coincidence possibly, but I doubt it. What's the most precious thing in deep space, Jarvis?'

'Air, water... take your pick...'

'And the training that teaches you not to waste them.

Even one-journey travellers know that.' She leaned forward.

'He asked me for a drink of water - *and then left it*! He might have been on Earth. The boy hasn't had space training, Jarvis.

He must be a stowaway...'

Immediately Jarvis Bennett's fear surfaced again.

'Sabotage!' he said explosively. 'He must be some kind of agent! But whose...'

'Well, plenty of people on Earth think we should suspend the space programme, use the resources to tackle Earth's problems. Some of them have tried to enforce their ideas...'

Jarvis Bennett seized on the theory enthusiastically. 'So these two stowed away on the Silver Carrier, disposed of the crew, pretended to drift here helplessly. We take them in and they start to sabotage the Wheel. Of course, everything fits!'

'It's a possibility, Jarvis - there are others...'

'We'll discuss them later.' Jarvis Bennett was already heading for the door. 'This could be serious. I'll deal with these people myself!'

6

Birth of Terror

Unaware that her guest had been branded a secret agent and potential saboteur, Zoe was still showing Jamie round, and explaining all about the operation of the Wheel.

'Now, this is the main Operations and Communications area -

the control room in other words.'

Jamie looked round the control room. 'Aye - but what's the Wheel doing up here in space?'

'It's a radio-visual station for Earth, a half-way house for deep-space travel, a space research station, a stellar early warning system for potentially dangerous space phenomena...'

Jamie grunted. 'Aye well, ask a silly question!' He dropped into one of the swivel chairs behind the main console.

'Not there,' said Zoe hurriedly. 'That's the Commander's chair!'

Jamie got up and he and Zoe moved over to Leo Ryan, who swung round and beamed cheerfully at them. 'You two are in for a treat.'

Bill Duggan, who'd tagged along on the tour said, 'The old man's going ahead, then?'

'Too right he is!'

Tanya Lernov looked up. 'I thought Doctor Corwyn had talked him out of it?'

'Only because she thought someone might be on board.'

He grinned at Jamie. 'Lucky for you, young feller.'

Jamie gave him a baffled look. 'Sorry, you've lost me.'

Zoe explained. 'The Commander, Jarvis Bennett... apparently he wanted to destroy the rocket.'

'We got your message just in time,' said Tanya. Leo Ryan nodded. 'I'll say. Only minutes in it, the lasers were all primed and ready to go.'

Tanya said, 'And now Jarvis has given the go-ahead to try again?'

'That's right. I've run a new co-ordinate fix to be sure.

The whole thing's primed and ready, all we need is the final signal.'

Jamie was horrified. 'You're no' going to blow up the rocket? What for?'

'Commander reckons its unsafe,' said Ryan. 'Might go out of control and ram us. So, to be on the safe side, we blast it out of existence first.'

Tanya said, 'Jarvis asked for a visual record, I'd better reposition the camera. Zoe, come and help me recalculate will you, you're quicker than the computer.'

As Zoe and Tanya moved across to the nearby camera console, Jamie began edging towards the door...

'Should be very interesting this,' Ryan was saying. 'It'll be quite an explosion.'

Jamie slipped out of the door. Nobody noticed him go.

Jamie strode boldly along the corridors of the Wheel.

One or two of the technicians looked curiously at him, but no one challenged him.

He had a good sense of direction, and he managed to find his way back to the power room without two much trouble. There were Bill Duggan's flowers, and there

close by was the capacitator bank - vital to the operation of the laser-cannon. Jamie began looking around. He opened a locker, and studied a row of aerosol cans on a shelf...

Jarvis Bennett meanwhile had just strode into the control room in search of Jamie. He was far from pleased to be told that the boy seemed to have disappeared. 'He was definitely here?'

Zoe said, 'Yes, Commander, Doctor Corwyn asked me to look after him.'

'We were showing him round,' added Bill Duggan helpfully. Jarvis Bennett winced. 'Round where?'

'Everywhere. We'd just come from the power room...'

'The power room,' said Jarvis thoughtfully. He beckoned Duggan aside and whispered urgently. 'Bill, don't say anything to the others. Just follow me out quietly when I go. Zoe, not a word about this to anyone.'

'Right, sir,' said Zoe obediently.

With a warning frown, the Commander marched out of the control room.

Zoe gave Bill Duggan a puzzled look. He shrugged.

'Don't look at me, I've no idea what's going on!'

Tanya Lernov came over to join them. 'Problems, Bill?'

'I don't know,' said Bill Duggan awkwardly. 'All in your mind, dear.' He hurried off.

By now Tanya was sure something was going on. 'What was the Commander talking to Bill Duggan about, Zoe?'

'Nothing important,' said Zoe. 'At least, I don't think so -

I don't know. Does it matter?' She too hurried away.

Thoughtfully, Tanya went back to the console.

'What's all the whispering about?' asked Leo.

'I wish I knew. Leo, did I ever tell you about my nose?'

'What about it?'

'It's like a barometer, it never lets me down... and I smell trouble.'

'Can you pin point where?'

'I think it's got something to do with that rocket out there. There's something sinister about it...'

They turned to look at a monitor screen. On it there was a picture of the abandoned rocket, drifting in space.

On board the rocket, something was happening.

The alien clock which had counted down to zero had re-set, and now the number on the digital read-out was mounting: 997, 998, 999...

As the count reached a thousand, a harsh electronic screeching filled the control room. Lights came on in a darkened section to reveal two giant silver spheres. Power leads connected them to a machine of the same alien design as the countdown clock. The machine began to hum with power and the silvery spheres started to glow.

As they lit up they became semi-transparent, revealing inside the crouched shapes of giant humanoid figures, bent over, knees to chin, like some ghastly parody of a human embryo.

The transparent membranes of the spheres began to expand as the figures inside stirred, slowly flexing arms and legs. It was like some weird and uncanny process of birth. The difference was that these creatures would not be born small and helpless but huge and powerful, ready to conquer and destroy.

A massive silver fist smashed open one of the spheres, and the towering monster within began rising to its full height...

7

Menace

‘I tell you, Leo,’ said Tanya Lernov obstinately, ‘There’s trouble on the way. My nose never lets me down!’

Gently Leo touched the nose in question with his finger.

‘Well, don’t over-work it, it’s much too pretty to risk damaging its shape.’

‘Just don’t say I didn’t warn you. That rocket’s dangerous.’

‘Not for much longer it isn’t. Once Jarvis gives the go-ahead, we’ll blast it out of existence.’

Thoughtfully Jamie studied the label on the aerosol can in his hand. ‘Liquid Plastic’. Underneath was written,

‘Unmeltable, Unbreakable, Everlasting’.

‘That ought to do it,’ thought Jamie grimly and, lifting off the protective dome, he began spraying the plastic right into the heart of the capacitator bank. He shot the plastic in at random, aiming for the most complex looking sections of the equipment in the hope of doing as much damage as he could.

Suddenly a hand gripped his wrist, wrenching the can away from the machinery, twisting the wrist savagely so that Jamie was forced to drop the can.

‘Red-handed!’ said an angry voice in Jamie’s ear.

Twisting round, Jamie saw he was in the grip of a stocky, balding, bearded man. Beside him was a horrified Bill Duggan. Grabbing a pair of gloves from the bench, Duggan grabbed a can of solvent from the locker and began squirting it into the machine. He shot Jamie a reproachful look. ‘What do you think you’re doing you fool?’

The bearded man tightened his grip on Jamie’s wrist.

‘Oh no, he’s not just a fool, Bill. He’s a saboteur!’

Bill Duggan stopped his spraying, and shook his head.

‘It’s no good, Commander. He’s wrecked it.’

‘Completely?’

Bill nodded. ‘The stuff’s had time to harden.’

‘Watch him,’ ordered the Commander. He shoved Jamie towards Bill, who stepped back and snatched up a spanner from the work bench.

Jamie held up his hands. ‘All right, I’ll not give you any trouble.’

‘Too right you won’t,’ said Bill grimly.

Jarvis Bennett was talking into a wall communications unit.

‘This is the Commander. Now hear this: all men on security duty are to draw side-arms immediately. Yellow Alert to be put into operation immediately. Two men from Security to report to the power room on the double.’

In the control room, Ryan turned to Tanya. ‘Yellow Alert? What’s the sudden panic?’ He rose. ‘I’ll have to go and log out the blasters. Keep an eye on the Hercules cluster, will you, Tanya? Zoe thinks one of the stars in Messier Thirteen is going nova.’

‘That’s all we need, a star blowing itself to a million pieces. I told you my nose was never wrong!’

Two massive silver figures now sat at the rocket controls.

Approximately man-shaped, they were much bigger than any man, a good seven feet tall, perhaps more. They seemed to be formed of some uniform silvery material, something with the qualities of both metal and plastic. Faces, bodies, arms and legs and the complex apparatus that formed the chest-unit, all seemed to be of a piece, made from the same gleaming silvery material. Their faces were blank, terrifying parodies of the human visage, with small circles for eyes and a thin letter-box slit for a mouth. The heads rose to a sort of crest into which was set what looked like a kind of lamp. Two strange handle-like projections grew out from the head in place of ears.

The Doctor, had he been there would have recognised them instantly. They were Cybermen.

At the moment they were busy with the communications equipment that had been installed in the rocket by their fellow Cybermen. A monitor screen had been fitted on to the rocket control console, with a control panel beneath.

As one of the Cybermen adjusted controls with a giant silver hand, first a sleek and sinister-looking space ship appeared. After a moment the ship faded, and the screen was filled by the head of the Cyber Planner.

The head, shaped similarly to that of the Cybermen themselves, was even more featureless, semi-transparent so that the convolutions of the great brain within could be dimly seen.

The Cyber Planner was a creature of pure thought. He had no physical functions as such, and was, in fact, no more than a vast living brain.

'Report,' said the Planner from the screen. His voice had a blurred electronic quality.

The first Cyberman replied in the same eerie voice.

'Phase One complete.'

'The Cybermats are launched?'

'Phase Two complete.'

'You are undetected on the rocket?'

'Phase Three now prepared.'

'Report again after completion of Phase Three.'

The screen went dark.

'Yellow Alert,' blared the communications system.

'Yellow Alert all sections.'

Security men hurried along the corridor, buckling on their hand blasters.

Zoe and Doctor Corwyn came along the corridor.

'You'd better check your theory with the computer,'

Gemma Corwyn was saying.

'Oh, I know I'm right,' said Zoe confidently. 'Hercules 208 in Messier Thirteen is definitely on the blink. I can tell what the radiation effect will be on Earth if you like.'

'Not now, Zoe,' said Gemma Corwyn gently.

They came to the corridor junction where their ways separated.

'I suppose you're going to see the fun, whatever it is,'

said Zoe.

Gemma Corwyn said, 'Somehow, Zoe, I don't think this is going to be fun.'

Flanked by two armed security guards, Jamie was watching Bill Duggan complete his examination of the damaged machinery.

Jarvis Bennett stood looking on impatiently. ‘Well?’

Duggan straightened up, glaring at Jamie. ‘You did a good job, boy!’

‘What’s the exact damage?’ demanded the Commander.

‘It’s very serious, sir. All the primary relay contacts are fused shut. The whole unit will have to be stripped down.’

‘How long?’

‘Depends how much plastic he used, and how far it penetrated.’

‘ *How long?* ’

‘I don’t honestly know, Commander.’

‘Surely you can give me some idea. You know as well as I do, without the laser-cannon we’re virtually helpless.’

‘Well, if we assume the worst - that the central storage charge unit is absolutely finished - it could take best part of a week.’

Gemma Corwyn hurried in and took in the tense scene.

‘What’s the trouble, Jarvis?’

He gestured savagely at Jamie. ‘This young idiot has ruined the laser - poured quick-seal plastic right into the relay lines for the Branston mirrors.’

‘But why?’

‘Sabotage - just as we said.’

‘No!’ protested Jamie.

Jarvis Bennett swung round on him. ‘What - are you one of these “Pull Back To Earth” maniacs? I suppose your friends are out there in deep-space, waiting to attack us now you’ve put our laser out of action...’

‘You’re talking rubbish,’ said Jamie.

Bill Duggan looked up from the machinery. ‘You can’t deny it. We saw you.’

‘I’m not denying anything,’ said Jamie sulkily.

Gemma Corwyn was looking shocked. ‘Is the laser really out of action, Jarvis?’

‘It is.’

‘But Zoe calculated there’s a new star going nova. We haven’t checked fully yet, but she’s usually right.’

Jarvis Bennett looked grim. ‘How bad is it?’

‘Zoe calculates that the radiation flux will swing the meteor shower straight in on us. With the cannon we could knock the worst of them out.’

‘I’d better get on with this as quick as I can,’ said Bill Duggan. He hurried to the communicator. ‘Maintenance! Get me maintenance... All hands to the power room, immediate and urgent!’

Jarvis Bennett said, ‘We’ll go and check Zoe’s calculations on the radar computers. Bring the boy along!’

The Commander, Doctor Corwyn, Jamie and his two guards all left the power room, leaving Bill Duggan to contemplate the ruined capacitator bank, and await the maintenance team.

He shook his head sadly. ‘What a mess!’ Suddenly a flash of movement caught his eyes. Something small and silvery had scuttled out of an open cupboard. Bill Duggan knelt to examine it.

At first glance it seemed like a sort of metal mouse, but when you examined it closer it was more like some kind of insect. Its scaled, segmented body was roughly triangular, with a sort of fringe around the base, and two huge red eyes glowed on the top of its head.

It shot backwards a foot or two as Bill approached, and then froze motionless. ‘Hang on,’ said Bill gently. ‘I’m not going to hurt you.’ He reached out slowly, and when the creature didn’t move he carefully picked it up. ‘Well, well, well, where do you come from, eh?’ He tapped the hard metallic shell. ‘You’re a strange little creature aren’t you?

Some kind of space bug...’

Perhaps it had come on board with one of his alien plants, he thought, grown maybe from some kind of egg - the cosmos was full of strange and wonderful things.

Whatever it was, Bill Duggan felt a sort of proprietary interest in it. When he heard the footsteps of the maintenance men approaching he said, ‘I think I’d better hide you, Billy Bug - they’ll think I’ve gone bonkers.’

He popped the creature back into the storage cupboard and closed the door.

Jarvis Bennett swung round from the computer read-out screen. ‘Radar computers Two and Five both confirm Zoe’s calculations.’ He jabbed an angry finger at Jamie.

‘Didn’t know what you were letting yourself in for, did you boy? Ever been in a sky station when the meteorites hit?’

‘Look, I’m sorry,’ growled Jamie.

‘Why did you do it?’ asked Gemma.

Jamie turned to the Commander. ‘They said you were going to give orders to blow up the rocket.’

Jarvis nodded. ‘So?’

‘I couldna let you, that’s all.’

‘Why not?’

Jamie looked round the circle of angry and concerned faces. ‘Because the Doctor told me to protect the rocket.’

‘Oh well, that’s marvellous, isn’t it?’ said the Doctor bitterly. ‘“The Doctor told me to protect the rocket”. Don’t bother about a convincing reason, will you? Just leave me to get you out of trouble!’

They were in the Doctor’s room in the medical section.

Jamie had refused to say another word until he had a private meeting with the Doctor, and after a lot of what Jamie called havering, his request had been granted.

The Doctor, looking very much better, was stretched out on a couch, clearly in a sort of half-way stage between being ill in bed and properly up and about.

‘Look, I had to stop them destroying the rocket, didn’t I?’ said Jamie desperately.

‘I suppose so.’

‘You know very well so! What about the TARDIS eh?

Fine thing if they’d blown that to pieces!’

The Doctor sighed. ‘And I was so enjoying this little rest.’

‘What are you going to tell them, Doctor?’

‘I’ve no idea - Jamie - what exactly did happen on that rocket? And there’s no need to look at me like that!’

‘Ye canna remember?’

‘Well, it is a bit hazy.’

‘I found you out in the corridor, by that locked door.

Something must have shook up the rocket. It tumbled me out of bed. It must have made you stumble and hit your head as well.’ ‘I hit my head?’

‘Don’t you remember anything, Doctor?’

‘Oh, I will. I will. Things keep lurking at the back of my mind.’

‘How about that robot thing in the corridor? The one that was about to attack you. Do you remember *that*?’

‘I’m afraid I don’t.’

Jamie sighed despairingly. How was the Doctor going to solve their problems if he couldn’t remember what they were?

The Doctor was staring into space. ‘But there’s something in the back of my mind, Jamie... Some warning.

Some menace...’

The Cyber Planner’s head was once more on the rocket’s monitor screen. ‘Report progress.’

The leading Cyberman said flatly. ‘All phases proceeding as planned.’

‘Excellent! Prepare Phase Four...’

8

The First Death

Enrico Casali and his colleagues were busy at the radar computer console. Leo Ryan, Tanya and Zoe were clustered round, anxious to learn the news that might determine their fate.

'Band eighteen,' ordered Enrico.

The technician adjusted the controls.

Enrico nodded. 'Too far - now back a bit. Try a cross-fix... just a touch more... it's coming clearer now.'

'Getting it?' asked Leo urgently.

'I think so... that's it... there! Hold on that and turn up the gain.' Enrico turned to the others, indicating the star chart on the screen. 'You see? It's all happening in the Hercules cluster all right.'

'I told you,' said Zoe brightly. 'The same thing happened in the Perseus cluster a week ago, remember?'

Tanya said, 'Only then we had the laser-cannon to deflect the biggest meteorites.'

Casali tapped the screen. 'You see? It's beginning to emit hard gamma already.'

'Is it bigger than the Perseus one, Enrico?' asked Leo.

'At least four magnitudes up.'

Leo Ryan winced. 'Well, better give the Commander the bad news.'

Tanya touched his arm. 'What are we going to do - if they can't repair the laser in time?'

'There's still the forcefield...'

Zoe shook her head. 'That won't help us. When a star of this magnitude goes nova it deflects meteorites with a mass of two hundred tons or more.'

Tanya shuddered. 'Two *hundred*?'

'At least,' said Zoe cheerfully.

'Aren't you *ever* wrong?' snarled Ryan.

'Rarely.'

'It's all a problem in solid geometry to you, isn't it?

Don't you care what happens to us?'

'Of course. I'm only telling you what's going to happen.'

'Yes, just like a robot. Facts, calculations. Little brain child, all brain and no heart!' Ryan strode away, and with an apologetic look at Zoe, Tanya followed him.

Zoe stared after them, a puzzled frown on her face.

Bill Duggan was supervising a team of maintenance men as they lifted the central core out of the capacitator bank.

'That's it... steady. Get that down to the workshops and start stripping it right away... I'll be along in a moment.'

As the men staggered out of the door with the heavy piece of machinery, Bill Duggan glanced down and saw a flash of silver. It seemed to be coming from the bottom of a half-open cupboard door. He bent down and saw the silvery bug shooting out of the door. It froze as he bent down.

'Hello, Billy Bug. You should've stayed where I put you...' Duggan stared into the cupboard his eyes widening.

There was a metal bar just inside the cupboard on the floor -
or rather, half a metal bar. The other half was corroded, eaten away.

Bill Duggan stared at the bug. 'Hey, did you do that?'

He opened the cupboard door. There was a tumbled pile of metal bars scattered inside the cupboard. Every one of them was partially eaten away. Duggan picked up one of the bars and was astonished to feel it crumble between his fingers like rotten wood.

'What have you done?' he said appalled. He looked down, but the silvery space bug had disappeared.

A technician called Rudkin came into the power room, and Bill Duggan wheeled around, wild-eyed.

Rudkin looked curiously at him. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing,' said Duggan hurriedly. 'How's it going?'

'The Commander asked me to come down and see if you needed any help. He asked how things were going.'

'You can tell him we're doing our best. Actually, there is something you could do for me. Look in on spares and ask them to give me a stock position on Bernalium, would you?'

'Sure.' Rudkin went out and Duggan turned back to the devastated store cupboard.

He unearthed an untouched stack of Bernalium bars at the very back and gave a sigh of relief. 'That lot's all right anyway. I'll murder that little beast...'

He turned away, closing the cupboard door firmly behind him. A silver space bug flashed across the floor, and froze just by the cupboard door. Its eyes glowed, the door opened and the space bug shot inside...

Gemma Corwyn was examining the Doctor, using a diagnostic machine much like the one she'd used on Jamie.

The Doctor still in shirtsleeves submitted meekly to her tests, watching with interest as the bleeping electronic stethoscope passed over his body, flashing its results on the little screen.

Gemma Corwyn sat back, putting the instrument away.

'You and your friend are amazingly healthy specimens, Doctor. Though some of these readings are...'

'Well, we all keep fit as best we can,' said the Doctor hurriedly. 'Does this mean I've got to get up?'

'Not quite yet, I'm afraid.'

'Oh good.'

'Does your head ache?'

'It did at first, but it's better now.'

'Any loss of memory?'

'Just a little.'

'Does that make you anxious?'

The Doctor smiled. 'Not unduly. I think you'll find my psyche quite in order.'

'Possibly. But you mustn't strain to remember.

Concussion does interfere with memory - like having a word on the tip of your tongue. There's quite a bit we don't know about the memory bank.' She smiled, then

added casually, ‘I suppose the bit you can’t remember is why you told Jamie to protect the rocket.’

‘Oh no, I remember that all right,’ said the Doctor cheerfully. ‘We’re not saboteurs, you know. The last thing we want is to interfere with your work, or put you in any danger.

You saved our lives and we’re very grateful.’

‘But you have interfered,’ Gemma pointed out coolly.

‘We’re in the path of a meteorite storm and we’ve no defence against it.’

‘I didn’t know about the meteorites,’ said Jamie. ‘I didna really ken what they were!’

The door opened and Zoe shot in. ‘Is it all right? The guard on the door let me in.’

The Doctor frowned. ‘Guard?’

‘We can’t let you roam wherever you want to,’ Gemma pointed out. ‘Not any more.’

‘We’re under arrest,’ said Jamie glumly.

‘How did you pilot the rocket so far, Doctor?’ asked Zoe.

The Doctor frowned. ‘I don’t think we’ve met.’

Gemma Corwyn said, ‘Zoe, this is Doctor... John Smith, isn’t it?’

‘What? Oh yes, that’s me,’ said the Doctor hurriedly.

‘And what do you do on the Wheel, Zoe?’

‘I’m an astrophysicist - a pure mathematics major.’

‘Really? I’m impressed.’

‘We use Zoe as our second opinion,’ explained Gemma.

Zoe wasn’t to be put off. ‘You didn’t answer my question, Doctor.’

‘What question?’

‘How did you pilot the rocket ship so far? There’s a record of the last contact with the Silver Carrier. It had seven million miles to touchdown and fuel for twenty million. It couldn’t have *drifted* ninety million miles off course in the time involved. It must have been driven and piloted. Somehow the rocket was refuelled in space, provided with at least another twelve fuel rods.’

‘That’s a very interesting theory, Zoe.’

‘It isn’t a theory, Doctor, it’s fact. Pure logic.’

‘Logic, my dear Zoe, merely allows you to be wrong with authority. Suppose a faulty automatic pilot was at work?’

‘Driving a rocket ninety million miles on fuel for twenty million? That rocket was driven here somehow, Doctor. I know it was!’

The worrying thing, thought the Doctor, was that Zoe was almost certainly quite right.

The Cybermen were once again in conference with their Planner.

‘We have ionised a star,’ announced the Planner. ‘Soon meteorites will strike the Wheel.’

The Cyberman said, ‘Phase Three is in operation.’

‘The Cybermats will consume Bernalium,’ droned the Planner. ‘Without Bernalium the Wheel cannot deflect the meteorites.’

The Cyberman said, ‘They will discover Bernalium aboard this ship. Phase Four is ready.’

‘Remove telemeter control from Cybermats,’ ordered the Planner. His image faded from the screen.

One of Bill Duggan’s space bugs - a Cybermat, to give it its proper name - was crouching in a corner of the power room. Suddenly its eyes glowed a fiercer red and it seemed to pulse with malignant energy.

The telemeter control, the device that rendered the Cybermats harmless when they had specific tasks to perform had been removed.

Now they were killers.

Rudkin came into the power room. ‘Bill?’ he called.

Bill Duggan was nowhere to be seen. Rudkin was just about to leave when the wall intercom flashed. Rudkin went over, touched a control and the face of a technician appeared on the screen. ‘Valiance from spares here. Bill Duggan around?’

Rudkin said, ‘No, I’m looking for him myself.’

‘You know we’re checking the Bernalium stock?’

‘Yes, Bill asked me to check up on it. I had a word with Chang.’

‘Well, we’re a bit puzzled - most of the Bernalium stock was transferred over to him in the power room weeks ago. Bill must have got his wires crossed. Have a look round will you, see if you can locate it?’

‘Sure.’

‘Call me back, will you?’

‘Will do.’

The screen went blank.

Rudkin started a methodical search of the many cupboards and storage lockers that lined the power room.

A Cybermat glided out of hiding and moved towards him, its eyes flaring red...

Bill Duggan was in Doctor Corwyn’s consulting room, pouring out his unlikely story. His conscience wouldn’t allow him to keep silent any longer - even if the Doctor did think he was potty. ‘... and now the Bernalium’s useless, Doc.’

What about the reserve?’

‘I asked for a check, but later I remembered. I’m already holding most of it in the power room. You know how much we rely on the Bernalium rods. They’re the only things that stand up in the laser-cannon.’

‘And what about these creatures of yours... I’m far more concerned about them.’

‘There’s only one - at least, that’s all I found.’ ‘Did anyone else see it?’

‘No.’

‘Did you tell anyone about it at the time?’

‘You must be joking. They already think I’m a nut for messing about with my flowers. How d’you think they’d react if I started telling them I’d found a space bug?’

Gemma looked thoughtfully at him. It could all be delusion - but it didn’t sound like it. ‘What did this bug look like?’

Duggan held his hands a little way apart. ‘About so big...

cross between a fish and a rat. Big red eyes. Body feels like metal or some light tensile material...’

‘And you say it eats metal?’

‘Not exactly. It sort of draws all the life out of it -

corrodes it. You should see what it does to Bernalium!’

‘But how did this thing get on the Wheel?’

‘Search me - I’m just the one who found it. Could have got in through a loading bay, or one of the air locks.’

Gemma looked dubious. ‘It’s possible, I suppose.’

Duggan said worriedly, ‘What’s the matter? You think I’m a nut, don’t you?’

Gemma rose. ‘No, I don’t. But I’d like to see this thing for myself.’

Bill Duggan jumped up. ‘Okay, be my guest. I’ll introduce you to Billy Bug with pleasure.’

They were in the corridor near the power room when they heard the scream. It was a terrible choking howl, like nothing either had heard before. They began to run. The scream echoed through the corridors of the Wheel. The Doctor, Jamie and Zoe heard it in the medical section and Jamie flung open the door of the Doctor’s room. He found himself facing an armed security guard, a massive heavy-featured Irishman called Flanagan. ‘You can’t come out,’ he announced.

‘What was that scream?’ asked Jamie.

‘It sounded like all the devils of hell,’ said Flanagan. ‘But you still can’t come out!’ He shoved Jamie back into the room and closed the door.

Bill Duggan and Gemma Corwyn rushed into the power room - and found Rudkin sprawled on his back across the trays of flowers. He was dead, and his face was twisted in horror, as if death had frozen the scream in his throat...

9

The Trap

Gemma Corwyn knelt to examine the body. After a moment she rose, shaking her head.

Bill Duggan was looking inside the open cupboard. The last pile of Bernalium had been scattered and corroded like the rest.

There was an empty aerosol spray can lying near the body... And there was something else.

Gemma Corwyn knelt down and touched it. ‘What’s this?’ Sealed to the floor was an irregularly shaped lump of what seemed to be solid plastic...

Some time later, the plastic lump was reposing on a tray by the Doctor’s couch, with the Doctor, Zoe and Jamie all peering at it.

‘The Commander’s mounting a full enquiry,’ said Zoe.

She tapped the lump. ‘But what I’m interested in is this!’

The Doctor said thoughtfully, ‘Found by the body, was it?’

‘They had to get one of the men to take up a floor plate.

The polymer strength of this plastic is higher than chrome steel. You can’t cut through it.’

‘The Gordian Knot couldn’t be untied either,’ said the Doctor quietly.

‘What does that mean?’

‘I think he means there’s always a solution,’ whispered Jamie.

‘And the Bernalium is useless, is it?’ asked the Doctor.

Zoe nodded. ‘Completely. We’ve got a few spares, but nowhere near enough.’

‘And the laser, the main defence of the Wheel relies on Bernalium...’

‘Maybe there’s a real saboteur on the Wheel,’ suggested Jamie. ‘Yon Bennett talked about some group or other...’

‘There are people who want to stop the space programme,’ said Zoe.

‘Aye well, mebbe they planted someone on board. The rocket comes along with us on board, and the saboteur uses the opportunity and strikes.’

‘And murders?’ asked the Doctor.

‘If he was caught, he might have had to kill.’

‘It’s an interesting theory,’ said the Doctor.

‘Well, everything fits,’ said Jamie.

The Doctor tapped the lump of plastic. ‘Except this.’

‘Och, it’s just a spare part. The man tried to defend himself with the plastic and it misfired and went over some lump of machinery.’

‘There’s one way we can find out,’ said the Doctor.

‘How?’ asked Zoe.

‘Use the X-ray machine!’ said the Doctor simply.

In the control room, the Commander’s enquiry was in progress. Jarvis Bennett sat behind a table, Doctor Corwyn beside him. A miserable-looking Bill Duggan stood before the table. ‘You’ll be sent back to Earth when the next ship comes in,’ the Commander was saying. ‘I want a written report on the whole affair in my hands first thing tomorrow. That’s all.’

As Bill Duggan turned away Jarvis Bennett said, ‘He’s to be confined to quarters. Leo, you’ll have to take over some of his operations. Tanya, you’ll have to cover for Leo.’

‘Very well, Commander.’

Jarvis turned back to Leo Ryan. ‘Remember, I want the laser working as soon as possible.’

‘Right, Commander.’

Jarvis swung round. ‘Enrico, is the boarding party ready?’

‘Laleham and Vallance are standing by, sir. Just waiting for the go-ahead.’

‘Then give it!’

‘Commander.’

As Enrico spoke into the intercom, Jarvis Bennett turned to Gemma. ‘I want a word with you in your quarters, Doctor Corwyn. As for the rest of you, let’s get back to normal working conditions.’ Leaving a flurry of activity behind him, Jarvis Bennett strode away.

Bill Duggan was talking quietly to Tanya.

‘Sorry, Bill,’ she said quietly.

‘It was my own fault, I was a fool.’

‘You didn’t do anything.’

‘I should have told somebody straightaway when I saw that creature. The old man doesn’t believe me, but it was there.’

Leo said, ‘We searched the whole power room, Bill.

There was a hell of a mess, but we didn’t see anything like your bug.’

‘Well, I didn’t dream it... What’s the use? Rudkin’s dead, and talking won’t bring him back.’ He moved sadly away.

In Gemma Corwyn’s quarters the Commander was letting off steam. ‘What’s the matter with you people? You can’t turn round without dreaming up some little bit of emotionally based fantasy. Did you hear that nut Duggan?

Space rodents! The man’s a wreck!’

Gemma Corwyn drew a deep breath. ‘Jarvis, will you listen?’

‘If it’s sensible, yes.’

Gemma began counting on her fingers. ‘One: the rocket drifts near us. Two: drops in temperature and air pressure, adjusted back to normal. Three: two meteorite storms, both above average dimensions, both within seven days. Four: two strangers brought to the Wheel, one of them sabotages the laser. Five: Bill Duggan’s apparitions, call them what you like, turn up and corrode our Bernalium... just when we’re facing a big meteor storm. I tell you Jarvis, that rocket is the base of all our troubles.’

‘Don’t worry about it,’ said Jarvis complacently. ‘I’ve just sent two men across to look it over. But, let’s have no more mysteries...’

After a certain amount of fiddling, the Doctor got the plastic lump into the scanning field of the X-ray machine beside his couch. Zoe was busy processing the prints.

The results would appear on the machine’s little monitor screen. At the moment the screen simply showed the plastic lump.

‘Right, they’re ready,’ said Zoe. She slipped the negative into the machine and flicked a switch.

Suddenly the plastic lump seemed to melt away, revealing a picture of the creature entombed inside.

Zoe heard the Doctor and Jamie gasp. ‘What is that thing?’ she asked.

‘A Cybermat,’ whispered the Doctor.

Jamie said, ‘But that means there are Cybermen here too then?’

‘That’s right, Jamie. And there’s only one place they could be - on that rocket!’

Propelling themselves by little thrusts from their oxygen cylinders, Vallance and Laleham drifted across space towards the rocket. A few minutes later they were clambering through the air lock, and making their way into the control room.

There was a crate in the centre of the control room, its lid already pried off. Valance and Laleham went over to it, and saw that it was piled high with Bernalium...

They heard heavy footsteps, and turned to find two giant silver forms towering over them. Laleham reached for the blaster at his hip, but as he did so a bright light beamed from the head of the Cyberman nearest him and he slumped, dropping the blaster. A similar beam from the second Cyberman was transfixing Valance. The beams brightened and the two spacemen straightened up, their bodies rigid.

The first Cyberman said, ‘You will take us to the Wheel.

Inside the Wheel you will help us. Obey!’

10

Trojan Horse

Jarvis Bennett stared at the image on the X-ray machine's monitor screen - it showed a Cybermat entombed inside the lump of plastic. 'And what's this supposed to mean?'

The Doctor said sombrely, 'It means that the Wheel is under threat from Cybermen.'

Jarvis laughed scornfully. 'Cybermen? Where did you dream up a name like that?'

Zoe was staring blankly ahead of her. 'The study and comparison of systems of control and communications in living organisms and machines,' she recited.

'What are you talking about?' snapped Jarvis Bennett.

'Cybernetics,' said Zoe.

'I know what Cybernetic means, young lady, and I don't need any lectures from you!'

'I tell you, Commander, these Cybermen do exist,' said the Doctor. 'You must believe me - you must!'

'On the evidence of one faked X-ray?'

'It's not faked,' said Zoe indignantly. 'I took and developed it myself, Commander.'

Jarvis Bennett looked angrily at the Doctor. 'So what exactly are these Cybermen?'

The Doctor's voice was grave. 'They were men once -
human beings like you. They come from the planet Mondas.
Now they are more machine than man.'

'You mean - half and half?' asked Jarvis Bennett uneasily.

'More than that,' said the Doctor. 'Their entire body is mechanised. Their brains have been treated neurosurgically to remove all human emotion, all awareness of pain. They are ruthless inhuman killers.'

Jarvis Bennett laughed nervously. 'You expect me to believe all this rubbish?'

'It isn't rubbish, Commander, believe me. They'll kill anyone who stands in their way. You've got to believe me!'

Laleham and Valiance looked on unmoving while the first Cyberman climbed into the enormous crate, now standing quite empty.

The second Cyberman said, 'You will take us to the Wheel. Inside the Wheel you will help us. Now obey your instructions.' The second Cyberman climbed into the crate.

Working together silently, the two men picked up the false top that lay propped against the crate and fitted it into place, so that it formed a sort of shallow tray, taking up the top quarter of the crate. Into this space they put the boxed bars of Bernalium. When they had finished the whole crate appeared to be full. They fitted on the lid, hammering it into place.

Then Valiance moved to the communication unit.

'Rocket to Wheel, Rocket to Wheel...'

The Doctor was still trying to convince the Commander of the danger they were facing. ‘Don’t you understand?

Somehow the Cybermen will get inside the Wheel.’

‘Nothing gets on and off the Wheel just like that. What do you think this is, a heliport?’

‘Listen to him will ye?’ urged Jamie. ‘He’s telling you the truth.’

Jarvis turned on him. ‘No, I’ll tell you what he’s doing -

what too many others are trying to do - spreading fear...

alarm and terror. Do you think I can’t see it? It must be some kind of space sickness...’

Gemma Corwyn said, ‘Jarvis, you might at least *listen*...’

‘How could anything get inside the Wheel?’ demanded Jarvis. ‘How will these creatures get through the airlocks? Or will they just float through the loading bay in full view of everybody?’

‘It’s still worth listening, and taking precautions,’ said Gemma. ‘Just in case there is some truth in all this.’

‘Don’t try to tell me my job, Gemma. I’m still Commander of the Wheel, and things will be done my way.

Any orders to the contrary will have to come from Earth Control, and that’s what... that’s...’ His voice trailed off.

Suddenly he turned and marched from the room.

The Doctor shook his head. ‘How do you convince a man like that?’

‘I think Bill Duggan should see that X-ray,’ said Gemma. ‘Go and get him, will you please, Zoe?’

‘Isn’t he still confined to quarters?’

‘Have him brought here under guard if necessary - you can use my authority - but get him, Zoe. I’ll be responsible.’ As Zoe hurried from the room, Gemma

Corwyn continued, ‘Jarvis was right about one thing, Doctor. These Cybermen of yours can’t just walk on to the Wheel.’

‘You don’t know the Cybermen as I do,’ said the Doctor.

‘Believe me, they’ll find a way.’

Valiance and Laleham were floating back towards the Wheel, propelling themselves by puffs of oxygen from their cylinders. Between them slung on a harness of ropes, there floated the enormous crate.

Vallance’s voice crackled from a speaker in the control room. ‘Survey party returning. We are coming in through the loading bay.’

Tanya frowned. ‘Ask why. We’ve prepared airlock five.’

Casali said, ‘Is anything wrong, survey party? Airlock five is ready for you.’

‘Survey party to Control. We have discovered a large crate of Bernalium on the rocket, and are bringing it over with us.’

‘This’ll cheer the old man up!’ whispered Casali.

Tanya nodded. ‘I’d better check with him though.’

‘Checking with Commander, survey party,’ said Casali. ‘Please await confirmation.’

Tanya was already talking to Jarvis Bennett on the internal visi-phone. ‘Survey party report a find of Bernalium on the rocket, Commander. They want to bring it on board.

Shall I give the go-ahead?’

Jarvis Bennett’s face beamed cheerfully from the screen.

‘Yes indeed, we need it badly. Somebody’s using their brains at last. Good work!’

Tanya nodded to Casali, and he spoke into his communications mike. ‘All clear for cargo, survey party.

Loading bay will be clear for your arrival.’

Bill Duggan was staring in astonishment at the picture of the Cybermat on the X-ray screen. ‘That’s old Billy Bug all right! What is it?’

‘An alien machine,’ said the Doctor. ‘Destructive, capable of killing.’

‘I thought it was some kind of space rodent - I know you all think I’m crazy...’

‘It’s a pity you didn’t tell someone about it straightaway,’

said the Doctor severely.

Bill Duggan’s voice was defensive. ‘I told the old man eventually - and look what happened? I got confined to quarters!’

‘I’d better take you back,’ said Zoe. ‘Then I’ve got to do some calculations on those meteorites - half the space fleet might be flying into them.’

‘The meteorites, yes, of course,’ said the Doctor suddenly. ‘The Cybermats must have been sent to put your laser out of action - that’s why they attacked your stocks of Bernalium.’

Jamie looked relieved. ‘So even if I hadn’t put the laser out of action, the Cybermats would have done it anyway.’

‘Are there any other defences?’ asked the Doctor.

‘There are magnetic field projectors,’ said Gemma. ‘The Meson Shields. But they can only ward off small meteorites.’

‘Maybe their destruction of the Bernalium had some other purpose,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘Wait a minute -

the rocket. There must be Bernalium on board the rocket...’

The doors of the loading bay were open on to the blackness of space. With eerie slowness the two spacemen floated inside, bringing the crate between them. A space suited technician stood waiting by the loading bay controls.

Once the two space-walkers and their cargo were safely inside, he touched a control and the massive double doors slid closed.

Slowly he brought up the artificial gravity field and the two men and their burden settled gently to the floor. There was a sudden whoosh as he fed air into the chamber. He studied the dials for a moment, then gave the two men a thumbs up sign.

Removing their helmets, all three men climbed the steep flight of steps leading up out of the loading bay.

The huge wooden crate was left on the floor of the loading bay. The Trojan Horse of the Cybermen was on board the Wheel.

Takeover

Zoe was reeling off a string of calculations into her voice-recorder when Jamie wandered into her library. ‘Hey, what are you doing, talking to yourself?’

‘I was recording some very important readings, James Robert McCrimmon - and now you’re recorded too!’

‘I’m not!’

Zoe touched a control and Jamie heard himself saying,

‘Hey, what are you doing, talking to yourself?’

He gave her an astonished look. ‘Och, have I ruined it?’

‘Not really. I thought you were confined to quarters?’

‘Och, I was going crazy - Doctor Corwyn told the guard I needed to get out for a while - she’s keeping the Doctor as a hostage!’

‘Well, you got off to a bad start, sabotaging the laser-gun.’

‘I had to do that,’ said Jamie.

‘Why?’

‘I canna tell you.’

Zoe looked curiously at him. ‘Tell me something else then. Is the Doctor telling the truth - about these Cybermen?

Do they really exist?’

‘They exist all right. I’ve seen them!’

‘Of course, such creatures are theoretically possible,’ said Zoe thoughtfully. ‘Given advanced cybernetic technology...’

‘Well, dinna be frightened,’ said Jamie reassuringly. ‘I’ll look after you.’

‘Oh, I’m not frightened, just curious. I should very much like to see one.’

Jamie realised she was quite sincere. ‘Och, you’re a funny wee thing. You take it all so calmly.’

‘All brains and no heart?’

‘I didna say that,’ protested Jamie.

‘No, Leo Ryan did.’

‘Well, he’s plain daft then!’

Zoe smiled at him, ‘Jamie, these calculations *are* urgent...’

‘Och, I can take a hint - I’m away!’ Jamie wandered off.

Feeling strangely cheered up, Zoe went back to her work.

Jarvis Bennett strode purposefully into the power room, Bill Duggan trailing behind him and surveyed the busy scene.

Leo Ryan and the burly Irish technician Flanagan were hard at work on the capacitator bank, which seemed to be lying in dis-assembled sections all over the power room.

‘How’s it going, Leo?’ asked the Commander.

Leo Ryan straightened up. ‘Not too badly, sir. We’ve been working non-stop.’

‘I’m giving you Bill Duggan here, Leo. No reason he can’t make himself useful. Keep up the good work!’ Beaming cheerfully, the Commander strode away.

Ryan said, ‘Boy, am I glad to see you Bill! This thing’s your baby, not mine.’

Bill Duggan cast a skilled professional eye over the machinery. ‘How’s it looking?’

Well, we’ve had a bit of luck. The central deployment complex didn’t get as much plastic as we feared. Maintenance have sorted it out and sent it back.’ He pointed to the central core which was scattered in pieces around the main console.

Bill Duggan nodded. ‘That’s great! How about the Bernalium problem?’

‘I haven’t got around to that one yet!’ Leo turned to Flanagan.

‘Go on, you, hoppit!’

‘I’ll grab a snack and be back in five minutes,’ promised Flanagan.

‘You’ll take forty-five minutes and like it,’ ordered Ryan.

As Flanagan grinned wearily and went off Bill Duggan said, ‘What about you, Leo, you look done in.’

‘Can’t leave you here all alone Bill, it’s a two-man job.’

The technician, Chang, came in just in time to overhear him. ‘Some people have all the luck - the Commander just nabbed me, said you needed some help. Of course, I’ve only done two watches in a row!’

‘Congratulations,’ said Ryan drily. ‘I’ve just done three!’

‘Go on, Leo, clear off,’ said Bill Duggan. Chang and I can handle things here.’

Leo Ryan said, ‘I’ll just have a quick bite and - all right, I know!’

‘You’ll take forty-five minutes and like it!’ said Chang and Bill Duggan in chorus.

Ryan grinned and went away. ‘Right,’ said Chang. ‘What do I do?’

The Doctor was studying another X-ray picture, not of a Cybermat this time but of his own skull.

‘You may get the odd headache for a while,’ said Gemma Corwyn. ‘But at least there’s no lasting damage. It’s an extraordinary X-ray, though. In fact, your whole physical make-up...’

‘I’m so glad there’s no damage,’ said the Doctor hurriedly. ‘Well done, Miss Corwyn.’

‘It’s Mrs,’ said Gemma Corwyn quietly. ‘At least, it was.

My husband died three years ago in the asteroid belt.’

‘I’m so sorry,’ said the Doctor gently.

‘My name’s Gemma. Why don’t you call me that?’

‘Thank you, Gemma,’ said the Doctor solemnly. ‘Now, tell me about your Commander, Mr Bennett. Isn’t he a strange man to be in a position like this?’

Gemma found herself torn between loyalty to Jarvis Bennett and a desire to confide in the Doctor. ‘Well, not in ordinary circumstances...’

‘Are there any ordinary circumstances in space?’

‘Jarvis simply can’t accept phenomena outside the known laws of science...’

The Doctor nodded. ‘I think that’s a very accurate - er...’

‘Diagnosis, you were going to say?’

‘You’re very perceptive, Gemma.’

She looked anxiously at him. ‘You think Jarvis’s attitude is a weakness - medically, I mean?’

‘Don’t you?’

‘Normally Jarvis is more than capable of commanding the Wheel. It’s a continuous, merciless responsibility...’

‘Exactly! But what does a man like that do when faced with a problem for which he doesn’t have a solution?’

‘I’ve been - concerned,’ said Gemma slowly. ‘I’ve a feeling that there are some things that Jarvis just can’t face.

He may have blocked off a part of his mind...’

Jarvis Bennett marched purposefully into the control room, and stood surveying the technicians, working busily at their consoles. ‘Everything going all right here? Yes, I can see it is. Good, good. Well done!’ Nodding and smiling at everyone who caught his eye, the Commander did a complete circuit of the control room and disappeared out of the door.

Tanya Lernov gave Casali a baffled look. ‘Enrico?’ He looked up from his console. ‘Mmm?’

‘Did you notice anything - odd, about the Commander?’

‘No - why?’

‘He seemed a bit - detached.’

‘Yeah?’

Tanya shrugged. ‘Probably just my imagination.’

The Doctor was struggling into his coat when Jamie came back into the room. ‘Well, here I am. Are you better now, Doctor?’

‘He needs more rest,’ said Gemma. ‘You shouldn’t be up and about yet, Doctor.’ She turned to Jamie. ‘Can’t you persuade him to rest?’

‘Och, it’s no use trying to stop the Doctor doing what he wants!’

‘Do be reasonable Gemma,’ said the Doctor. ‘I’ve got to get up - I know the danger we’re in. The Cybermen want the treasures of Earth, you see, they want to colonise...’

‘But you’re not even supposed to leave this room, Doctor. Jarvis gave orders -’

‘He isn’t fully responsible!’

‘I’m sorry, Doctor. I can’t countermand the Commander’s orders.’

‘But you let Jamie out.’

‘Only briefly. He’s got to stay here now - and so must you.,

Jamie grinned. ‘Hey, Doctor, she’s as stubborn as you are.’

The Doctor was about to protest further, when Jarvis Bennett strode into the room. ‘Everything in order here?

Good, good. Up and about, eh, Doctor? I’ve done the tour, Gemma, and everything’s running like clockwork!’

‘That’s fine, Jarvis. I think we ought to talk about the rocket...’

‘Yes, yes, everything’s going well,’ said Jarvis. ‘You must want to stretch your legs a bit, have a wander around.’

The Doctor shot Gemma a quick look. ‘Er, yes, thank you. You’ll tell the guard?’

‘Yes, I’ll deal with it.’ He opened the door and addressed the bewildered guard. ‘Off you go, everything’s in order!’ The guard moved away.

‘Jarvis!’ said Gemma sharply.

He swung round. ‘Make a note about morale, Doctor Corwyn. Never been better. Everything’s in order...’ His voice tailed off. ‘Tired now, better turn in. Sleep, that’s the idea, I’ll be needed at first watch...’ Reviving, he beamed at them.

‘Well, keep up the good work!’ With a cheery nod, Jarvis Bennett turned and marched away, a happy man in a world in which everything was in order.

A world of his own.

In the power room, Bill Duggan was gloomily examining the handful of uncorroded Bernalium rods that he’d been able to scrape together. ‘These are no good to us anyway - they’re all covered in plastic.’

‘Didn’t anyone tell you?’ said Chang. ‘They brought back a whole load of Bernalium from the rocket. It’s still in the loading bay.’

‘Well, don’t just stand there, go and grab me half a dozen rods. With a bit of luck we can have this lot reassembled in a few more hours.’

‘On my way,’ said Chang, and hurried out.

A few minutes later, Chang came down the steps to the loading bay. The place was in semi-darkness. The crate from the rocket stood in a little pool of light in the centre of the bay. Chang went to the box, lifted the lid, and took one of the boxes of Bernalium rod from the inside.

Removing the box revealed the wooden surface of the false top, and with a shock of astonishment, Chang realised that the top layer of Bernalium was all there was. He took out the rest of the boxes and then lifted out the false top, revealing the empty blackness beneath.

As he peered inside a giant silver hand reached out of the shadows behind him, and gripped his shoulder, pulling him back. Chang swung round, wrenching himself free and staggered back against the crate. For a moment he stared up in unbelieving horror at the giant silver form towering over him. Then he snatched up one of the boxes of Bernalium rods he’d just unpacked and hurled it at his attacker’s chest.

The Cyberman staggered back, and Chang ran for the stairs... A second Cyberman appeared out of the darkness, blocking his escape. He turned, spun around - and saw Laleham and Vallance come out of the shadows.

‘Help me!’ he screamed.

But neither man moved or spoke. Chang turned again, dodged round the Cyberman blocking his path and made a desperate doomed run for the steps. The chest units of both Cybermen glowed fiercely for a moment, and caught in the fierce light Chang twisted, screamed briefly and died.

One of the Cybermen walked to the foot of the stairs, scooped up Chang’s body and carried it away, thrust almost casually under one arm...

Into Danger

Tanya Lernov glanced up as an indicator light came up on a side-console. ‘Enrico, someone’s using the incinerator in the loading bay. Have you got it down?’

Casali punched up information on a read-out screen.

‘Nothing here.’

Leo Ryan wandered in, looking fresh and rested.

‘What’s the problem, Tanya?’

‘Somebody just used the loading bay incinerator.’ ‘Looks like a spot of unauthorised waste-disposal,’ said Casali. ‘Better log it, Tanya. Someone’ll catch it...’

Bill Duggan was hard at work reassembling the capacitator bank when Laleham and Vallance came into the power room. He looked up. ‘Hullo, boys. Where’s Chang?’

Laleham said flatly. ‘He cut his hand. He has gone to the medical bay.’

Both men, Duggan saw, were carrying boxes of Bernalium rods. ‘Trust him. Poor old Chang!’

Vallance said, ‘What is to be done?’

‘Open a box of those rods will you?’ said Duggan. I’ve nearly beaten this job. I only hope the rods are the right size.’

‘They are,’ said Laleham.

Bill Duggan shot him a quick glance. ‘Didn’t know you were an expert.’

In the same toneless voice Laleham said, ‘The laser must be made operative, or the meteorites will destroy the Wheel.’

‘No!’ said Bill Duggan sarcastically. ‘What do you think I’m sweating over here for?’

Laleham handed him a Bernalium rod. ‘It is the right size.

Duggan slotted the rod in place. ‘It is too! You must be psychic. Better not tell the old man, he doesn’t believe in it.’

‘When will the repair be finished?’ asked Valiance.

Bill Duggan was finding his two visitors a bit of a pain.

‘It won’t get done at all if you don’t stop nattering at me.’

‘The meteorites must not harm the Wheel,’ said Valiance again.

Bill Duggan returned to his work. ‘Worried about the storm, are you? Well, don’t be. It’ll be a close thing, but I reckon on having the laser assembled and ready for operation in, oh, six or seven hours maximum.’ He looked up at them and grinned. ‘So you two can sleep like babes, daddy won’t let anything happen to you!’ Once again he bent over his work, whistling tunelessly.

Valiance walked over to the door and opened it. A Cyberman came into the room.

Still bent over his work Bill Duggan said, ‘Look, if you two want to make yourself useful...’ He looked up, and saw the Cyberman. Slowly he straightened up. He opened his mouth to scream but a beam from the Cyberman’s helmet transfixed him and he went rigid, staring straight ahead of him - just like Laleham and Valiance.

The Cyberman said, ‘The Wheel must be protected from the meteorites. We will reassemble your laser. You will go to the control room. Here are your orders...’

Gemma Corwyn was in her quarters, studying a medical file on her computer read-out screen. The file was headed: Jarvis Bennett.

She looked up almost guiltily as someone came into the room. Hurriedly she switched off the screen. 'What is it, Zoe?'

Zoe said worriedly. 'It's rather difficult... I've just made a report, some calculations... I've been told to forget them.'

'Ordered by whom? What report?'

'My calculations on the path of the meteorite storm. I found evidence of a critical state, reported it to the Commander -'

'And he ignored it?'

Zoe nodded. 'You don't seem very surprised.'

'He's getting worse,' said Gemma almost to herself.

'Is he ill?' asked Zoe.

'I'm not sure, yet.'

'If he is ill,' said Zoe seriously, 'he's chosen a rather inconvenient time, hasn't he?'

'Not very emotional, are you, Zoe?'

'Emotional?' Zoe frowned. 'Leo Ryan said I was all brain and no heart.'

'It's just your training, Zoe. I shouldn't worry about it.'

'Oh, but I do,' said Zoe solemnly. 'Don't want to be a freak. Maybe Leo's right. My brain's been pumped so full of facts and figures... I want to feel things too.'

Gemma Corwyn said gently, 'Some people with your training do have trouble developing their human emotions.'

'You don't think I'll be like that, do you?'

Gemma Corwyn smiled, 'No, you appear to have survived your brainwashing very well.'

'Good,' said Zoe.

'Now then,' said Gemma Corwyn. 'Tell me about these calculations of yours...'

In the control room, the Doctor and Jamie, apparently restored to favour were being given the tour.

'... and this last one here is how we check all energy expenditure,' Tanya was saying. 'Any device on the Wheel that uses energy shows up somewhere on the board... from a coffee grinder upwards.'

'Have you got any coffee?' asked the Doctor hopefully.

Tanya shook her head. 'I've got a coffee tablet - would you like one?'

The Doctor shook his head and wandered away. 'You won't forget to keep an eye out for some mercury, Doctor,'

whispered Jamie.

'I haven't forgotten, Jamie. I'm very worried about the TARDIS. If I'm right and there are Cybermen aboard that rocket...'

Zoe and Gemma hurried into the control room, and were soon engaged in a low-voiced conference with Leo Ryan, Tanya and Casali.

The Doctor beckoned to Zoe, who came over to them.

'What's going on?'

‘I did some calculations on the meteorites - they’re heading towards us faster than I’d first thought.’

‘Don’t you ever have any cheerful news?’ growled Jamie.

‘Facts are facts,’ said Zoe primly. ‘And these are indisputable.’

‘I wouldn’t dream of arguing,’ said the Doctor hurriedly. ‘Can you get the laser repaired in time?’

‘Apparently. The real worry’s the Commander. He just brushed my warning about the meteorites aside. That’s the worry, not the laser.’

‘He’s getting worse,’ muttered the Doctor.

Zoe nodded. ‘That’s what Doctor Corwyn said. He is ill, isn’t he?’

Blatantly the Doctor changed the subject. ‘ *Why* aren’t you more worried about the laser? Even if you get it fixed in time, I thought all the Bernalium had been destroyed.’

‘Oh no,’ said Zoe confidently. ‘Some more turned up.’

‘Oh good!’

‘Yes, two of the men brought a crate of it over from the rocket.’

‘ *What did you say?* ’

‘That’s what Flanagan said - I met him coming off duty.’

The Doctor went and grabbed Gemma Corwyn’s arm and marched her away from the group. ‘Did you know about this Bernalium from the rocket?’

‘Yes, Tanya told me just now.’

‘Don’t you see? The Cybermen came over in that crate!’

‘But our men wouldn’t have brought them across.’

‘Maybe they were tricked.’ The Doctor frowned. ‘Or maybe they knew what they were doing. Cybermen have ways of making people carry out orders.’

‘Hypnotism?’ asked Gemma.

‘Something like that.’

‘But all Wheel personnel are protected against brain control. There’s an implanted Silenski capsule. It gives off a signal if there’s any interference with the brain of the wearer.’

‘How can we check?’ asked the Doctor.

Gemma led him over to Tanya. ‘I want to check the Silenski circuit.’

‘I’ll have to activate the whole detection network.’

‘Do it,’ said Gemma. ‘I’ll authorise the extra power.’

Tanya adjusted the controls and a large monitor screen came to life, with a network of electronic trace-lines running endlessly across it. ‘If the lines are even, everything’s normal...

I’ll scan this room first.’

As Tanya began her check, Bill Duggan came into the control room. He hovered uncertainly in the doorway.

Jamie moved over to Zoe. ‘What’s he hanging round like that for?’

Zoe frowned. ‘I thought he was confined to quarters.’

She went over towards the door. ‘Hullo, Bill, has the Commander...’

Bill Duggan went on in to the control room, ignoring her.

The lines on Tanya’s scanner began fluctuating wildly.

‘Look!’

‘Someone is affected,’ said Gemma. ‘You were right, Doctor!’

‘It’s someone in this room,’ whispered Tanya.

‘Can we pin it down?’ asked the Doctor quietly.

‘I’ll scan the room,’ said Tanya. She adjusted controls.

‘Somewhere over... *that* way...’

She pointed - and they saw Bill Duggan raise a big spanner high above his head and smash it down on the communications console, again and again...

‘Stop him!’ yelled the Doctor.

Jamie hurtled across the room and tried to pull Bill away, but was thrown off with apparently superhuman strength. The spanner smashed down again. Sparks crackled across the console, and Casali was suddenly hurled backwards out of his chair. As the spanner rose again, Leo Ryan drew his blaster and fired... Bill Duggan crashed to the ground.

The Doctor ran to the body and knelt to examine it.

‘He’s dead. The Cybermen must be here, on the Wheel. They took over this poor fellow and sent him to stop you from getting a message to Earth.’ He turned to Gemma. ‘If you’ll take my advice, you’ll alert the whole Wheel. You’ll need something to stop your people from being taken over. Small sheets of metal will do, taped to the back of the neck. It interferes with the Cyber control signal.’

‘I’ll see to it,’ said Leo Ryan, who had come to join them.

‘What do we do? asked Jamie.

‘We’re going hunting,’ said the Doctor grimly.

‘Oh aye? Are you sure you know who’s to be hunted?’

The Doctor and Jamie moved off.

Zoe watched them go. She shivered. ‘I feel cold, Doctor Corwyn.’

‘It’s shock,’ said Gemma gently. ‘Just sit quietly and keep out of the way.’

Zoe sat down shivering. She had never felt more frightened - or more useless.

The Doctor and Jamie came down the steps into the loading bay. The empty crate stood in its little pool of light.

‘Well, there it is,’ said Jamie.

‘Sssh,’ whispered the Doctor.

They crept cautiously over to the crate. The loading bay seemed to be empty. The Doctor and Jamie studied the crate, working out the purpose of the false top. They saw the boxes of Bernalium bars, stacked beside the crate. The only thing they didn’t see was the giant silver form of the Cyberman as it descended the steps behind them...

Cybermat Attack

Suddenly Jamie heard the scrape of metal on metal, turned round and saw the descending Cyberman.

It was still at the top of the steps, staring arrogantly straight ahead, and for the moment it didn't seem to have seen them. Jamie grabbed the Doctor by the arm and heaved him out of sight behind the crate, and into the shadows beyond. The Cyberman descended to the floor of the loading bay, picked up one of the boxes of Bernalium rods, turned and went back up the steps.

As it disappeared, Jamie gave a silent whistle of relief.

'That was close.'

'I can't understand them,' said the Doctor. 'It's so easy now.'

'Eh? What are you talking about?'

'Destroying the Wheel, Jamie. That's what I'm talking about. From the outside it's strong enough, but now that the Cybermen are inside...'

'Aye, I see... What d'you think they're planning then?'

'I don't know, Jamie, not yet - but it's obvious that they don't want to destroy the Wheel.'

'What do they want then?'

'I wish I knew. But the first thing we must do is protect these people.'

'Aye, but how do we do that?'

'What's the one thing we need to survive that Cybermen don't?'

'Food?' suggested Jamie, thereby reminding himself he was feeling peckish.

'Always thinking of your stomach,' said the Doctor reprovingly. 'No, air... that's what, air!' The Doctor rose and went over to the wall communication unit. 'Now, I wonder how this works?'

In the control room, Tanya called Gemma Corwyn and Leo Ryan over to her console. 'It's the Doctor, calling from the loading bay.'

They saw the Doctor's face on Tanya's monitor. 'It would be wise to seal off all the airlock doors,' he was saying.

'Can you do that?'

Tanya glanced at Leo, who nodded. She turned back to the Doctor. 'Yes, we can. Why?'

'The Cybermen are definitely on the Wheel. Jamie and I have just seen one. They may try to interfere with the air supply.'

'Doctor,' whispered Jamie.

'Yes, what is it?'

Jamie pointed. 'I think I saw something move, over there in the shadows. I just caught a glimpse of it in the corner of my eye.'

The Doctor turned, peering into the shadows.

'What's wrong?' asked Gemma.

Tanya said, 'I don't know.'

'Shall I seal off the airlock doors, Gemma?' asked Leo.

Gemma considered for a moment, then nodded. ‘Yes, do it.’

Leo went over to another console and began issuing instructions. Tanya looked up at Gemma Corwyn and said quietly, ‘I suppose we can trust the Doctor?’

‘I’m not sure why I do, but I do,’ said Gemma. ‘Anyway, sealing off the airlocks is good common sense.’

Jamie pointed again. ‘There, look!’

The Doctor saw a Cybermat, gliding from a patch of shadow into the light. It didn’t appear to have seen them as yet... The Doctor turned back to the intercom, speaking in an urgent whisper. ‘Listen to me very carefully. Please, just do as I ask and don’t delay. There’s a Cybermat very close to us.

Any moment it’ll tune into our brainwaves...’

Jamie had been keeping the Cybermat under observation. ‘It’s turning, Doctor,’ he whispered. ‘And look, there’s another!’

The Doctor whispered into the wall mike. ‘Hook up a vario audio-frequency to this channel - at once please!’

Tanya looked at Gemma for a decision.

‘Do it please, Enrico,’ she ordered.

Casali began making rapid adjustments of a console.

They heard the Doctor’s voice. ‘Hurry! Please hurry!’ ‘Come on, Enrico,’ pleaded Gemma.

Casali flipped a switch. ‘That’s it - power on.’ They heard a low, oscillating electronic howl.

In the loading bay the sound was coming from the communications mike which the Doctor had deliberately left swinging from its wall fitting.

The Cybermats began gliding forwards.

The Doctor and Jamie retreated slowly towards the steps...

‘Come on, let’s run for it!’ urged Jamie.

The Doctor shook his head. ‘They’ve got a range of at least ten feet...’

The Cybermats made a sudden dart forwards, as if to attack. But the move brought them within range of the sound from the dangling wall mike... Suddenly they began swinging to and fro in erratic curves, like disorientated dodgem cars.

Their paths intersected and they collided with a metallic crash. For a moment they were still, then one began zooming round in circles while the second sped straight for the wall.

The circling Cybermat began giving out smoke, ground slowly to a halt and expired in a final puff of smoke. The second Cybermat smashed into the bulkhead and blew up, disappearing in smoke and flame.

In the control room the Doctor appeared on the monitor, waving his hands. ‘That’s quite enough, thank you!’

Casali switched off the electronic howl.

The Doctor ducked down then popped up again with the defunct Cybermat displayed on a box lid. ‘This is what you saved us from!’

Tanya peered at it unbelievingly. ‘What is it?’

Zoe, who had been looking on silently all this time said,

'It's a Cybermat.'

'Exactly,' said the Doctor. 'We're coming back as soon as we can.'

As the Doctor's face vanished from the screen, a light began flashing on a nearby console.

'Leo?' called Tanya.

He came across to her, and she indicated the light. 'It seems to be a signal from the power room.'

Leo studied the indicator light, puzzled. 'Yeah - and it doesn't seem to be coming from our power source. Let's check it out...'

In the power room a Cyberman was operating a Cyber-Communications Unit, reporting to the Planner. 'The Cybermats have been destroyed.'

'By what method?'

'By the use of high-current phase contrast.'

'Some human has knowledge beyond our prediction.

Continue report.'

'The laser-cannon is now repaired and operative.' 'And the communication beam to Earth?'

'Attacked and damaged.'

The Planner said, 'Excellent. Phase Six will now be completed. The Wheel is to be taken over.'

Enrico Casali looked down at the shattered communication beam console, shaking his head. 'Bill Duggan knew the spots to attack all right. What a mess!'

'How about radar?' asked Tanya.

'That's okay. But the Earth communication circuits are done for.'

'What time's the next check with Earth Central?'

'Two hours time.'

'Better set up a fix on the first wave of the meteorites.'

Casali shrugged. 'Doesn't seem much point, not without a laser to knock them away with.'

'Don't be a pessimist, Enrico. They may not hold on a crash course to us. Anything can happen.'

Casali grinned. 'Everything has!'

Leo Ryan looked up his face concerned. 'I've been checking the different sections on the intercom.'

Tanya looked puzzled. 'And?'

'I can't raise anyone...' He looked worriedly at her. 'We might be alone on the Wheel.'

Meteor Storm

Tanya's eyes widened in alarm. 'Have you told Gemma Corwyn?'

'Not yet. I reckon she's got enough on her plate. I'll go on checking...'

On the other side of the control room Jarvis Bennett was sitting in his command chair, with Gemma, Zoe, Jamie and the Doctor grouped around him. Gemma had persuaded him to leave his quarters for the control room in the hope that familiar surroundings might help to restore him to normality, but it wasn't working. Jarvis Bennett's earlier euphoric mood had faded, and he was slumped down in the chair a picture of depression while Zoe held a lifeless Cybermat up in front of him.

'Jarvis, look at it,' pleaded the Doctor. 'Bring it forward, Zoe, into his line of sight.'

Zoe held the Cybermat directly in front of the Commander's face. Jarvis Bennett's eyes widened. He began shivering, and twisted his head away. 'No... it's not true... not true...'

Gemma Corwyn said, 'All right, Zoe, put that thing away somewhere.' She looked at the Doctor. 'It looks like complete withdrawal.'

'Not necessarily complete,' said the Doctor. 'Catatonic features, certainly.'

'I could try E.C.T.... maybe he could be shocked back to normal.'

'Give him a little more time,' said the Doctor. 'You've thrown a forcefield around this section - strong enough to keep the Cybermen out?'

'Strong enough to keep anything out!' She looked worriedly at Jarvis, who was staring gloomily at the ground.

'It's no good, Gemma,' said the Doctor gently. 'You're the second in command - you'll have to take over.'

'Take over what?' asked Gemma bitterly. 'We've been invaded, we've no contact with Earth, and we're in the path of a storm of meteorites, and we can't fight them off because there's no laser!'

Zoe took the Cybermat over to Jamie, and put it down on top of a console. Jamie nodded towards Jarvis. 'How is he?'

'Hopeless, he's just closed himself away. Doctor Corwyn's second in command - I suppose she'll take over.

Though what she can do... or any of us, for that matter. I feel so useless, Jamie.'

Jamie patted her clumsily on the shoulder. 'You're just not trained for this sort of emergency.'

'That's the whole point! What good am I? I've been created for a false kind of existence where there are only known emergencies. What good is that to me now?'

'Hey, we're not done yet, you know,' said Jamie. 'We'll survive this mess yet!'

Zoe didn't look convinced.

Leo Ryan was still going on with his check. 'Section twelve? Make contact section twelve!'

There was no reply.

Section twelve was the oxygen supply room. There was no answer to Leo Ryan's call because the duty technician lay dead on the floor, a Cyberman towering over him.

Flanagan came into the power room, and looked around, surprised to find it empty. The wall communications unit was buzzing and he went to answer it.

Suddenly Valiance appeared from around the side of a storage locker and stepped forward, barring his way.

'So there you are,' said Flanagan. 'Why don't you answer that thing, someone sounds a bit violent.'

Valiance said flatly, 'It is not important.'

'It could be the old man himself, for all you know!'

Laleham stepped out from behind another storage locker.

Suddenly Flanagan noticed that the capacitator bank for the laser-cannon, which he had last seen in numerous pieces, seemed to have been reassembled as good as new. 'Is the laser working again?'

Laleham said, 'The repair is finished.' He spoke in the same flat tone as Valiance.

'So we're not to be riddled by meteorites after all then?

Sure that's a relief, and me with a whole year's Earth leave due!'

The Intercom was still buzzing, and instinctively Flanagan went to answer it again, and again Valiance barred his way. 'Do not touch that.'

'You can't just ignore it!' To Flanagan's utter astonishment, Valiance drew his blaster. 'Have you gone mad?' demanded Flanagan.

Valiance said, 'Do as you are told.'

Contemptuously Flanagan swept the blaster aside.

'What's the matter with you, boy?' He gave Valiance a shove that sent him staggering back.

Laleham too drew his blaster.

Flanagan promptly knocked it out of his hand, and knocked Laleham down for good measure. Flanagan backed away, raising his fists. 'All right, come on! If it's a fight you're after, I'm your man. Come on both of you!' Flanagan was a big powerful man, and an accomplished brawler.

Laleham and Valiance, their reflexes dulled by Cyberman control were just no match for him.

Valiance came forward, aiming a clumsy blow, and Flanagan side-stepped and knocked him down with scientific precision.

Laleham scrambled to his feet and rushed at him, a heavy spanner in his hand. The spanner swept towards Flanagan's head, Flanagan dodged aside, and the spanner smashed into a metal bench with a force that jarred it from Laleham's grasp.

Now thoroughly enraged, Flanagan grabbed Laleham and began shaking him to and fro. 'Now that wasn't sporting!

You want a few lessons in the Noble and Manly Art, me friend.'

Shaking his head, Valiance scrambled over to his fallen blaster, snatched it up, and got to his feet, aiming the weapon at Flanagan's back. He fired... Just as Laleham, in a frantic effort to break free from Flanagan's grip, twisted himself around - and stumbled full into the path of the blaster bolt.

Laleham staggered and fell dead to the ground.

Flanagan and Valiance stood motionless for a moment, Flanagan shocked out of his fighting fury, Valiance shaken free of the Cyberman's control.

'You've killed him!' gasped Flanagan.

Valiance stared at him, too shocked to speak. Then his eyes widened as he stared over Flanagan's shoulder, and his body went rigid.

Flanagan swung round, and saw the giant silver form of a Cyberman looming over him.

Before Flanagan could move or speak, he was transfixed by the beam from the Cyberman's helmet. His body went rigid, and he stood passive, waiting.

The Cyberman spoke. 'The laser has been repaired?'

Valiance bowed his head. 'Yes.'

'A force field is in operation around the control room.

How is it operated?'

'From within the control room itself.'

The Cyberman glanced down at Laleham's body.

'Dispose of this human.' It turned and stalked away.

Obediently, Flanagan and Valiance lifted Laleham's body...

Zoe was feeding Jarvis Bennett water from a beaker. He took a sip or two, then turned his head away like a sulky child.

'No more...'

'Just give him what he wants,' said Gemma.

She went to join the Doctor and Jamie, who were grouped around Casali who was operating the radar screen.

'They're coming through now.'

A whooshing, humming sound was coming from the radar complex. 'It's a big one,' said Casali. 'Even bigger than we thought.'

'All right, all right, don't make it worse,' said Leo Ryan nervously.

Gemma said, 'We've still got the anti-matter field projectors.'

'You don't think meteorites like this are going to bounce off that, do you?' said Casali. 'We're talking about things weighing two or three hundred tons here!' He adjusted his screen and suddenly they could see a swarm of blips, travelling across the screen. 'There they are - swarms of them

- and they're headed straight for this Wheel!'

Poison in the Air

There was a moment's awed silence.

'How far away are they?' Gemma Corwyn asked.

Casali studied his instruments. 'Under a million miles, now. Closing in on an elliptical path, tilted ten degrees.'

As yet, the danger wasn't imminent. But it was unavoidable.

Suddenly there came a buzz from the communication-unit, and Flanagan's face appeared on screen. 'Power room here.'

'Flanagan! Where have you *been*?' said Leo Ryan explosively.

'We have been repairing the laser capacitator bank.

Work has now been completed.'

Leo Ryan was too excited to register Flanagan's flat voice and stilted manner. 'Are you telling me the laser's working again?'

'Ready for testing.'

Leo swung round to the others. 'Hear that? The laser's repaired! Stand by to run a test.' He turned back to the screen. 'Why didn't you answer me, Flanagan? I've been calling for ages!'

'There must be a fault on the line,' said Flanagan in the same dull voice. 'Valiance is with me. We're ready when you are.'

Gemma, the Doctor, Jamie and Zoe stood watching as Leo and his team ran through a series of checks. 'What's the range of this thing?' asked the Doctor. 'Fifty-thousand miles for total destruction, ninety for partial,' said Gemma.

'Hmm... won't do to miss any, will it?'

'Some of the forerunners will be in range now. We can use them to test. We'll try a random shot,' said Leo. 'At least it'll tell us how the power bank reacts. Blue control.'

Casali said, 'Red on standby. Angle eighty-eight to zero four zero one. Distance closing, five four nine, four eight...

zero!'

'Fire!' said Ryan. 'Tanya give me a power reading.'

'Power normal at maximum. Meteor has been destroyed.'

Leo Ryan sat back satisfied. It had been just one shot, one meteor destroyed out of untold numbers... But steering and power had responded perfectly. Leo Ryan said cheerfully, 'Well, everybody, I think we stand a chance.'

It was some time later. The Control room was humming with activity. More and more of the meteorites were coming in range now and Leo and Tanya and the rest of their team were steadily deflecting or destroying them.

Against the steady background of information, orders and reports the Doctor and Gemma were talking quietly.

'I think it's safe to assume that the Cybermen caused this meteor storm,' said the Doctor. 'They must have made the star go nova.'

'Why?' asked Gemma. 'To destroy the Wheel?'

'No, they just wanted to make you use the laser. The Cybermats were sent in to attack the laser, by ruining the Bernalium.'

‘Aye, that’s right,’ said Jamie. ‘Then you’d be sure to search that drifting rocket, find the crate and bring it on board - with Cybermen hidden inside!’

The Doctor nodded. ‘It was all a cunning plan to get on to the Wheel.’

Gemma said, ‘And you really think it was the Cybermen who repaired the laser?’

‘They had to,’ said Jamie, ‘or the Wheel would have been smashed up!’

‘This isn’t just an attack on the Wheel,’ said the Doctor.

‘The Cybermen have an overriding ambition to invade Earth and plunder its mineral wealth. Somehow they must be able to see a way of doing that through this Wheel...’ The Doctor began patting his pockets. ‘Jamie, the Time Vector Generator - where is it?’

‘You’ve got it. I put it back in your pocket when we were on board the rocket.’

‘But I haven’t got it!’

‘It must have fallen out of your pocket, just before they brought you across. Is it important?’

‘Important?’ spluttered the Doctor. ‘It’s vital! Someone will have to go over to the rocket and find it.’

‘Well, good luck to them whoever they are! Who’s going?’

‘Well, Jamie, if Doctor Corwyn can spare someone to help you make the crossing - you are!’

‘Me?’

‘You’re the only one besides me who knows what to look for, and I’m needed here. Besides, it’s your fault it’s lost!’

In the power room the Cyberman was making a further report to the Planner. ‘The meteorite shower is now approaching the Wheel. The weapons of the humans have been tested and are operative.’

‘Phase Six can now be completed.’

‘The humans have set up a force field barrier around the section containing their control room.’

The Planner said, ‘To complete Phase Six it will be necessary to initiate plan three.’

The Cyberman switched off the communicator and turned to Vallance, who had been waiting silently in the corner. ‘Follow me.’

Jamie, Zoe and Gemma Corwyn stood waiting at a corridor junction. The air before them seemed mildly hazy.

Looking through it, things on the far side looked blurred, and if you tried to walk through you would have been held motionless. Gemma looked at her watch, and suddenly the haze vanished. Gemma hurried across the junction, motioning Jamie and Zoe to follow her.

On the far side, she picked up a wall communicator.

‘Replace the force field barrier - we’re through.’

Zoe said, ‘I’ll check that it’s clear ahead.’ She moved on a little.

‘Don’t see what you’ve landed me with her for,’

grumbled Jamie.

‘She knows enough space drill to get you across to the rocket - and she’s the only one I can spare.’

‘I still think I’d do better by myself!’

Gemma smiled. ‘Do you? Don’t be too sure.’

Meanwhile in the control room, Leo Ryan and the Doctor were having a furious row about the same subject.

‘Zoe agreed to go,’ said the Doctor obstinately. ‘She’d no right to agree - and you’d no right to ask her.’

‘It had to be done. Jamie will look after her.’

‘Have you any idea what it could be like between the Wheel and that rocket. The whole area’s bound to be bombarded with debris...’

‘They know the risks,’ said the Doctor quietly. ‘Zoe calculated them.’

‘And what about Gemma? She’ll have to make her way back here on her own.’ He glared at the Doctor. ‘From now on you don’t do anything without checking with me first, OK?’ He glared angrily at the Doctor, and the Doctor scowled mutinously back at him.

‘Meteorite coming in range - now!’ called Casali.

Leo went back to his console.

The route to the airlock led through the oxygen supply room - and there Gemma and her party had stumbled on the body of the dead technician.

Shocked, Gemma knelt to examine the body. ‘Is he dead?’ whispered Jamie.

Gemma straightened up. ‘I’m afraid so. Zoe, the emergency exit.’ She led the way to a hatch in the wall and opened it. ‘That’ll take you to the airlock. You’ll find space equipment in the supply locker.’

‘Right, come on, Jamie,’ said Zoe. She clambered into the dark space, and Jamie scrambled after her.

‘Good luck,’ said Gemma as she closed the hatch behind them. Crossing over to the wall unit she called the control room. ‘They’ll be away any minute. Shouldn’t be any problems.’

In the control room, Casali called, ‘This is the main concentration... coming into range now.’

‘Crossover on vector link,’ said Ryan. ‘Countdown as from now...’

They bent tensely over their instruments.

Out in deep-space the massive meteor swarm was still hurtling swiftly and silently towards them. Hundreds of meteors had been deflected or destroyed, but there were hundreds more to come. It would only take one to destroy the Wheel and everyone on it.

Gemma Corwyn was about to set off back to the control room when she heard movement in the corridor and ducked into hiding behind an instrument console.

A Cyberman stalked into the room, Valiance behind him. The Cyberman surveyed the oxygen room. ‘Each section of the Wheel has its own oxygen supply?’

‘Yes,’ said Valiance.

The Cyberman handed him a metal container, which held rows of silver capsules. ‘Insert one capsule into the supply for each section. The oxygen will turn into pure ozone and the humans will die...’

‘Fire!’ commanded Ryan. Another meteorite exploded in space.

‘We’re hitting them,’ called Casali. z ut there are so many... It’s hopeless.’

‘Shut up,’ snapped Ryan, hunched over his console.

‘Fire!’

Suddenly the monitor screen came to life and Gemma’s face appeared. ‘Gemma Corwyn to control room.’

The Doctor, the only one not fully occupied, leaned forward. ‘Yes, Gemma, what is it?’

‘The Cybermen are going to poison the air supply. Do you understand? Tell Leo Ryan to switch over to the emergency sectional supply units. Do you understand?’

The Doctor peered into the monitor. Gemma was looking not at the screen but at something just behind her.

‘How do you know, Gemma?’ called the Doctor. ‘What’s happening there? You must get back here right away.’

The screen went blank.

Hanging up the mike, Gemma Corwyn turned to face the giant silver form that was looming over her. The communication unit had been in a corner some way from Valiance and the Cyberman. She knew that she would be heard - but she also knew that the call must be made.

Drawing her hand blaster, Gemma trained it on the Cyberman and fired. It stopped, staggered back, then continued its remorseless advance. Before she could fire again, the Cyberman’s chest unit glowed fiercely, and Gemma twisted and fell.

Jamie and Zoe, space-suited and steering with their oxygen packs, were over half way to the rocket when the fringe of the meteorite storm reached them. Jamie saw it first.

‘Zoe, look!’

It was an astonishing, terrifying sight; the debris of a shattered star, chunks of rock the size of golf balls, footballs, others as big as a house, and icebergs, some very like small mountains.

Jamie heard Zoe’s voice sounding inside his space helmet. ‘It’s the meteorites, Jamie - and they’re heading straight for us!’

Perilous Journey

'Fire!' shouted Leo Ryan.

Somewhere a meteorite, heading for the Wheel, exploded in smoke and flame.

'We're still hitting them!' said Casali grimly.

'What about Jamie and Zoe?' asked the Doctor. 'They're out there too you know.'

Tanya said, 'They'll be in danger from shock, from radiation and blast...'

'They'll have to take their chances,' said Leo savagely. 'I can't think about anything except stopping those meteorites.'

He returned his attention to the firing console. 'Fire!'

Tanya looked up at the Doctor. 'They'll be blown out of space!'

'Zoe calculated the risks,' said the Doctor. 'Let's hope she was right!'

Explosions all around them, holding hands in an attempt to keep together, Jamie and Zoe cartwheeled through space, flung to and fro by the explosions all around them.

A final, violent explosion very close to them blasted them apart and they spun off in different directions...

'The radar screen's clear,' said Casali. 'We've done it!'

'Any sign of Jamie and Zoe?' asked the Doctor anxiously.

'Can't pick 'em up on screen till all the static's cleared.'

'We'll stay on Blue standby for the moment,' said Leo.

'There'll be a cloud of small stuff following behind. Check all circuits, maintain power levels till further notice.'

Leo Ryan rose and stretched, glanced curiously at Jarvis Bennett, who was still slumped motionless in his chair, and went over to the Doctor. 'You realise what you've done, Doctor? Those two kids have probably been either burnt up by radiation, or fried by thermal blast - always assuming they weren't actually hit by all that rubbish.'

'Do you think I'm not aware of that?' said the Doctor bitterly. 'It was a calculated risk - one which had to be taken.'

'Why?'

'Because there's something on board the rocket we need if we're to defeat the Cybermen.'

'Something that justified risking two lives?'

'In order to save many - yes. Incidentally, we'll all die very soon unless you switch over to sectional emergency air supply.'

'What?'

'The Cybermen are planning to poison your air.'

Leo Ryan stared at him. 'How do you know?'

'Gemma Corwyn told me.'

'Where is she?'

'In the oxygen room but -'

'I want to talk to her.' Ryan headed for the communicator.

‘I’m afraid you can’t,’ said the Doctor sadly. ‘She’s dead.’

Leo Ryan went and punched up a picture of the oxygen room on the monitor. It showed a section of floor, with the lower part of Gemma Corwyn’s crumpled body.

‘She sacrificed herself to warn us,’ said the Doctor.

Casali looked up from his radar screen. ‘Here comes the following wave!’

‘Right,’ said Leo. ‘We’ll try three second interval shots, but we’ll reinforce the anti-matter shield around the Wheel as well. Maybe we can deflect some of this lighter stuff off course.

Tanya, switch over to sectional emergency air supply.’

The rattle of readings, instructions and commands filled the control room once more as the second wave of meteorites were either deflected or destroyed.

Suddenly the Doctor said, ‘Where’s Jarvis?’ The Commander’s chair was empty.

Jarvis Bennett marched purposefully along the corridors, away from the control room. He had lost his former apathy and looked determined, even exalted.

Tanya was flicking the monitor screen through various channels in an attempt to locate him when the communicator screen lit up, showing Jarvis Bennett’s face.

‘Jarvis, what are you doing?’ called Ryan. ‘You must come back!’

‘No, I’m going on,’ said Jarvis calmly. ‘They killed Gemma, you know. I lifted the force field to get out - you’d better replace it right away.’

Leo Ryan rose and headed for the door, but the Doctor caught his arm. ‘Where are you going?’ ‘To fetch Jarvis back.’

‘I’m afraid it’s already too late for that. Look!’ The Doctor pointed to the monitor.

They saw Jarvis turn away from the screen and move off down the corridor - straight towards an approaching Cyberman.

Jarvis Bennett smiled, as if pleased to come face to face with his enemy. He drew his blaster and fired, blast after blast at the approaching Cyberman - but to no effect. Hurling the weapon at the Cyberman Jarvis Bennett closed with it, in an attempt to wrestle it to the ground.

His action was as suicidal as it was brave.

The Cyberman caught and held him in an inflexible steel grip, simply ignoring his attempt to attack. It raised him high above its head then smashed him to the ground. Even then, Jarvis wouldn’t give up.

As he struggled feebly to rise, the Cyberman’s chest unit glowed fiercely and caught in the killing beam, Jarvis’s body writhed and twisted grotesquely for a moment, then fell back, dead.

The Cyberman stepped over the body and moved on. In the control room a horrified audience watched his death struggle on the monitor.

Tanya turned away. ‘Please, turn it off...’

The Doctor flicked the control and the screen went blank.

Jamie had good reason to be grateful for Zoe’s brief bit of space training. Somehow he’d managed to brake himself with his air jet then steer himself over to

the rocket, where he found Zoe just about to enter the airlock. Now they were both on board the rocket, feeling somewhat astonished to be alive.

Jamie was fetching Zoe some water from the dispenser.

'Thanks, Jamie,' she said, sipping it gratefully.

Jamie looked at her in concern. 'How do you feel?'

'I really didn't think we were going to get through,' she said. 'I feel as if someone's been hitting me all over with hammers!'

'Take it easy while I look round.'

Zoe got up. 'No I'll help.' She looked round the control room. 'What is it that we're looking for?'

Jamie held his hands apart. 'It's a rod, about so big, with black and gold tips to it. Come on then, let's start looking.'

The Cyberman said, 'You have inserted the capsules into the air supply unit?'

'Yes,' said Vallance dully.

'Inject it into the system.'

Vallance operated a lever and there was a hiss of air.

The Cyberman said, 'Effective penetration should be immediate. Report!'

Valiance studied the oxygen room instrument dials.

'They have already switched over to the emergency supply.'

'Can that be reached?'

'No. The controls are inside the force field.'

The Cyberman hesitated - then called up the Planner on the Cyberman communication unit.

The eerie transparent head appeared on the little screen, 'Do you report success?'

'No. Our plans have been anticipated.'

'Wait. The Data will be re-computed.' There was a high-pitched electronic twittering and symbols flowed across the screen.

The Planner reappeared. 'One of the Earthmen must have experience of our method. Projection of all identities on the Wheel is essential...'

Jamie found the missing rod in the corridor, just outside the little cabin. He came hurrying back into the control room.

'Here it is, Zoe, I found it. We can go back now -'

Zoe waved him to silence. After a perfunctory search of the control room she had started fiddling with the communication equipment - with very unexpected results.

On a monitor screen, Jamie could see one of the Wheel technicians, a Cyberman beside him, using some kind of communication device.

'Come and look, Jamie,' said Zoe excitedly. 'This could be important. I seem to have broken in on the Cyberman frequency...'

The Invasion

‘Stare into the device,’ ordered the Cyberman. The light on its helmet glowed gently.

Vallance obeyed.

The Cyberman said, ‘Now think of each individual human on the Wheel. Form the image in your mind.’

The Cyberman Planner sat staring straight ahead, concentrating on the images that appeared in con-junction with Vallance’s voice.

‘Tanya Lernov. Astrologer, second class.’ A young, fair-haired human female.

‘Negative,’ said the Planner.

‘Leo Ryan, Communications Officer.’ A large human male.

‘Negative.’

‘Jarvis Bennett, Station Commander.’ An older human.

‘Negative.’

‘Zoe Heriot, Astrophysicist, Astrometricist, first class.’ A small human female.

‘Negative.’

‘That’s me,’ said Zoe. ‘They seem to be running through all the crew of the Wheel, one after the other.’

‘But why?’ said Jamie wonderingly. ‘What are they after?’

The figure of a small male dark humanoid appeared, and for the first time Vallance’s voice faltered. ‘Doctor... The Doctor... I don’t know his name.’

‘Repeat image,’ ordered the Planner. ‘Concentrate!’

In the control room a conference was in progress. ‘But what possible use could these Cybermen have for the Wheel, Doctor?’ Leo Ryan was asking.

‘That remains to be seen,’ said the Doctor infuriatingly.

‘Why shouldn’t they simply be attacking us?’

‘Why would they go to all this trouble just to knock out one space station?’

Tanya interrupted them. ‘Leo, there’s something on radar.’

The Doctor and Leo went over to the radar screen. ‘Not a meteorite,’ said Casali. ‘Look, it’s changing course.’

‘No ships are due in this sector of space,’ said Tanya, checking her log.

Casali said, ‘Too big for one of ours anyway.’

‘It could be a Cyberman ship,’ said the Doctor quietly.

‘Moving in for the kill?’ suggested Leo.

‘Possibly.’

Leo turned to Casali. ‘What about the Earth communication system, Enrico? We must try to contact Earth for assistance.’

‘Not a chance,’ said Casali. ‘Oh, I could repair it all right, given time, but I’d need some valve transistors and some replacement circuitry, and they’re all in the power room.’

‘Then someone will have to go and get them,’ said Leo.

‘Positive,’ said the Planner. ‘Positive; the Doctor is known and recorded as an enemy of the Cybermen. He must be lured outside the force field and destroyed.’

In the rocket control room, Jamie leaned forward and switched off the scanner. ‘They’re going to try and trap the Doctor. We must get back and warn him.’

They began putting on their space helmets.

The Doctor, Tanya and Leo Ryan were poring over a map of the Wheel.

‘This is the route to the power room,’ said Tanya, tracing the corridors with her forefinger.

Leo Ryan frowned. ‘Trouble is, we don’t know where the Cybermen will be - the direct route’s no good.’

‘Well, how else will you get there. Through the cable tunnels?’ He shook his head. ‘They’re blocked off - here and here. That leaves the emergency air tunnels...’

They were interrupted by the buzz of the communicator, and turned to find Flanagan’s face on the screen.

‘Flanagan, where are you?’ said Ryan.

‘In a corridor near the workshops. I’ve got a whole bunch of them locked up in a workshop.’

‘Well done, Flanagan! Is the way to the power room clear?’

‘It is for now. But they’re trying to melt down the doors, I may not be able to hold them for much longer.’

‘Well try to keep them bottled up as long as possible,’

said Ryan. ‘One of us has to come through for some radio spares.’

‘Right, I’ll seal off some more compartments, sir. But you’d better send someone for those spares pretty quickly.

They may be trying the other doors.’

‘Tell him I’ll go for the spares,’ whispered the Doctor.

‘It’s better if I go,’ said Ryan. ‘I know just where -’

‘It’s essential that I go,’ insisted the Doctor.

Ryan shrugged. ‘All right, Doctor, it’s your neck.’ He turned back to the intercom. ‘Flanagan, the Doctor’s coming for the spares. Hold the Cybermen back as long as you can.’

‘Right, sir. I’ll meet the Doctor in corridor six.’ The screen went blank.

The Doctor took Ryan aside. ‘When Flanagan turns up here, let him in through the force field - then grab him!’

Tanya said, ‘But he isn’t coming here. He said he’d meet you in corridor six.’

The Doctor smiled. ‘I don’t think so.’ He picked up the map. ‘Now don’t forget, don’t trust him. Check the safety plate on his neck. Turn off the force field so I can get out will you? Oh, and tell me where the spares are, will you?’

Ryan told him, and the Doctor hurried away.

In corridor six, Flanagan stood stiffly before a Cyberman. ‘The Doctor will come here, to corridor six.’

‘Excellent. You will return to the control room. Once they have admitted you, you must destroy the machinery that sets up the force field.’

Flanagan turned and moved away.

It was dark and eerie in the deserted power room. A grille moved in the wall, and the cover was lifted off from inside. The Doctor clambered down into the room and looked around. Following Ryan's directions, he located a shelf of spares above a workbench, and filled his pockets with the vital equipment. On a nearby shelf he found a phial of mercury.

Beaming delightedly he stowed it away in a separate pocket.

On his way out, the Doctor paused by the main work bench, still cluttered with odds and ends after the repair of the laser capacitator. Some Bernalium rods, coils of wire, connectors and plugs - and a handy power point nearby...

'Yes, I think so,' said the Doctor. 'Worth a try!' Picking up a coil of wire he set to work...

Zoe and Jamie had a much calmer journey from the rocket to the Wheel. They reached the airlock without incident, and returned to the oxygen room through the same hatchway by which they'd left it. They slipped out of the door and moved off down the corridor. Suddenly a massive figure stepped out of a side corridor.

Zoe looked up at him. 'Flanagan!'

'And what are you doing wandering about? Don't you know them creatures is everywhere? You two come with me now, this way's quicker.'

He led them off down the side corridor.

Not far away, in corridor six the Cyberman turned to Valiance. 'The Doctor has not come.'

'He must have gone another way. There's an air tunnel leading to the power room.'

'Show me,' ordered the Cyberman.

They moved away.

The Planner's orders had to be obeyed - the Doctor must be found and destroyed.

In the control room, Ryan and Casali were waiting, one each side of the door. Tanya stood waiting too, a blaster in her hand. They were waiting for Flanagan.

Just as the Doctor predicted, Flanagan had called in on a communicator and asked them to let down the force field so that he could come into the control room. He was bringing Jamie and Zoe with him.

The door opened, and Flanagan came in.

Ryan and Casali jumped him. They wrestled him to the ground, face down, and Tanya passed Leo one of the Doctor's improvised metal plates to clamp on his neck.

Jamie and Zoe, who had followed Flanagan in, looked on appalled.

'What are you doing?' demanded Zoe. 'He helped us, he guided us back here.'

'He's controlled by the Cybermen,' said Tanya.

Ryan finally managed to get the metal plate fixed to the back of Flanagan's head. He bucked and reared wildly for a few moments, and then lay still. After a moment he groaned, clutching his head.

Ryan got to his feet, still panting. 'He'll be all right now.

Let's get him sat down, Enrico.' Between them they got Flanagan into a chair.

Jamie looked round. 'Where's the Doctor? We overheard the Cybermen planning to lure him into a trap.'

Tanya said, ‘But he’s already -’ She was interrupted by the buzz of the communicator.

The Doctor’s face appeared on screen. ‘I’ve got the spares.’

Jamie hurried over. ‘Doctor!’

‘Jamie! Are you and Zoe all right?’

‘Aye, we’re fine. Listen, Doctor, the Cybermen know you’re on the Wheel. They’re planning to trap you.’

‘Yes, I thought they might. Jamie, did you find the Time Vector Generator?’

‘I have it right here, Doctor.’

‘Just bring it to me, would you Jamie? Get someone to show you the way through the air tunnels. I’m afraid I’m expecting visitors.’

The screen went blank.

‘Visitors?’ Jamie frowned. ‘What does he mean -
visitors?’

The Doctor made a final connection to the power box and straightened up. He had built up a structure of Bernalium rods on either side of the door, and both were connected by cables to the power box. His work was finished, just in time.

A Cyberman was standing in the doorway.

‘Oh, are you waiting for me?’ asked the Doctor politely.

‘You are the Doctor? You know our ways.’

‘Yes, I thought you’d realise that someone did, sooner or later,’ said the Doctor modestly. ‘I imagine you have orders to destroy me?’

‘Yes,’ said the Cyberman.

The Second Cyberman appeared beside the first.

‘Tell me,’ said the Doctor conversationally. ‘Why did you make Duggan destroy the radio communication beam to Earth. That is why you want the Wheel, isn’t it? As a way to reach Earth?’

‘He was instructed to destroy only the transmitting complex.’

‘Of course,’ said the Doctor. ‘How interesting. I suppose your giant Cyber-ship holds your invasion fleet, and the smaller ships inside need the guidance of a radio beam from Earth?’

‘You know our ways,’ repeated the Cyberman. ‘You are to be destroyed.’

‘Yes, I thought we’d get back to that sooner or later. Do come in!’

The Cyberman stepped into the doorway.

The Doctor stooped down and threw the power switch.

Electricity crackled between the two sets of Bernalium rods.

Caught in the powerful force field the Cyberman writhed and twisted in a sort of grotesque dance - a dance of death. Smoke poured from its helmet and chest unit and suddenly the Cyberman went rigid and crashed to the ground like a felled tree. The second Cyberman’s chest unit glowed - but the Doctor’s electric forcefield repelled the deadly ray.

‘It’s no good you know,’ said the Doctor calmly. ‘You can’t break through the field.’

‘Others are coming, Doctor,’ said the Cyberman threateningly. ‘You will be destroyed.’ It backed slowly away, disappearing down the corridor.

The Doctor heard a sound and spun round. The grille was being lifted away from inside. A moment later, Jamie appeared, followed by Flanagan.

'Ah, Jamie,' said the Doctor happily. He looked suspiciously at Flanagan. 'Is he all right now?'

'Aye, he's fine,' said Jamie. 'Aren't you, Mr Flanagan?'

'Except for a head like a big base drum I am,' growled Flanagan. 'And somebody's going to pay for it.'

Jamie looked down at the dead Cyberman. 'Looks as if you've made one pay already, Doctor.'

'Yes, but they're sending in reinforcements, Jamie.

Probably through the loading bay. Just give me the Time Vector Generator, will you?'

Jamie handed it over.

'I'm going to try to fix this into the laser gun circuitry,'

explained the Doctor. 'With luck it'll boost the power energy to destroy the Cyber-ship. You'll have to hold them off at the loading bay for me - I need time!'

'Leave it to me,' said Flanagan.

'There's still one Cyberman left on the Wheel,' warned the Doctor. 'You'll have to deal with him first.' He fished in his pocket. 'Oh, and here's a protective plate for Vallance when you find him.'

'Right, sir,' said Flanagan taking it. He grabbed a can of spray plastic from a shelf. 'Let's see how them creatures like this! Well, come on Jamie, let's be at them!'

Flanagan and Jamie hurried off, and the Doctor headed for the laser gun capacitator bank.

The final stage of the Cyberman invasion was about to begin.

An End and a Beginning

Casali looked up from the radar scanner. ‘That ship’s moving closer. It’s colossal!’

Ryan was talking to the Doctor over the intercom.

‘I’m trying to put more power into your laser,’ said the Doctor. ‘Line the cannon on the Cyberman space ship and I’ll tell you when I’m ready.’

‘You’d better be ready soon,’ said Ryan. ‘That ship’s on the move.’

‘I know,’ said the Doctor. ‘They’re planning to invade the Wheel.’

Flanagan marched Jamie into the loading bay, both of them now wearing space suits. Vallance, also space suited stood waiting, and beside him was the waiting Cyberman.

‘I couldn’t get into the power room for the force field,’

explained Flanagan. ‘I caught this feller on the way back.’

‘He is not important,’ said the Cyberman. ‘Guard him.

He may be useful later.’

Luckily the Cyberman had a lot to worry about, thought Jamie. They all stood, waiting.

The Doctor was working rapidly on the laser bank, trying to find a way of building in the Time Vector Generator without blowing the whole installation.

Ryan was watching him on the intercom. ‘Hurry, Doctor. That ship’s still moving in!’

In the loading bay the Cyberman moved towards the door controls.

‘Now,’ yelled Flanagan.

Jamie leaped on Valiance, bearing him to the ground, trying to clamp the metal plate Flanagan had given him onto the man’s neck. Valiance stuggled furiously...

As the Cyberman turned, Flanagan brought up the plastic gun and emptied it into the Cyberman’s chest unit.

The Cyberman staggered back choking. Smoke began pouring from its helmet. It reeled back, collapsing - but before it fell, it managed to press the button that opened the loading bay doors. The doors slid back onto the blackness of space.

Jamie managed to clamp the metal plate to the back of Vallance’s neck - and the man went limp. Struggling to his feet, Jamie looked out through the opening doors and gasped.

The horizon was filled by the colossal bulk of the Cyber-ship, now incredibly close. And from the ship there was streaming an army of Cybermen, jetting towards them through space.

Flanagan ran to the control, and the doors began to close. But not quickly enough. The leading Cybermen were almost on them now, and the first managed to jam itself in the doors before they were quite closed. Incredibly, its strength was such that it could stop the doors from closing.

With limitless others to help, the Cybermen would be able to wrench the doors open again, Jamie realised. ‘Use the plastic!’ he yelled.

He heard Flanagan’s frantic voice inside his helmet.

‘Can’t... emptied it onto the other one...’

Through the gap, Jamie could see more Cybermen arriving to aid the first.

In the control room, the laser-cannon was aligned on the colossal Cyber-ship - the ship that held the invasion fleet destined for Earth. They were waiting for the Doctor now.

His voice came over the intercom. ‘Right, everything’s ready here!’

‘Fire,’ yelled Leo Ryan.

A beam of extraordinarily intense light shot from the Wheel’s boosted laser cannon, striking the Cyber-ship at point blank range. The ship was bathed in a fierce glow of light -

and exploded in smoke and flame.

The glare lit up the loading bay like lightning.

The Cyber-ship might be gone, thought Jamie - but they still had swarms of angry Cybermen, clustering around like wasps - and any moment now they’d be inside.

Flanagan had opened up a panel in the wall, and was throwing switches. ‘I’m going to operate the neutron field barrier. Hold on!’ He threw the last switch and the loading bay, and indeed the whole of the exterior of the Wheel hummed with power.

The force field was designed to repel the smaller meteorites - but it repelled Cybermen as well.

Shot off from the Wheel, they spun away into the blackness of space, cartwheeling away into infinity.

The door closed and Flanagan touched the control that flooded air back into the loading bay.

‘We’ve done it!’ gasped Jamie, and sank exhausted to the ground.

‘Wheel to Earth control,’ said Casali. ‘Stand by for emergency report.’ He looked round. ‘Where’s Zoe, by the way?’

‘Taking the Doctor and Jamie back to the rocket,’ said Tanya.

A voice from the speaker said, ‘Earth Control standing by. Report.’

Leo Ryan drew a deep breath. ‘This is Leo Ryan, Acting Commander of Station Three. Radio contact with Earth lost at 1252 hours, due to attack by alien force...’

Leo became aware of Tanya’s cool hand removing the protective metal plate from his neck.

He caught one of her hands and held it as he poured out the incredible story of recent events on the Wheel in space...

Jamie and Zoe were standing in the control room of the rocket.

‘So you’ve really got to go back?’ said Zoe.

Jamie nodded awkwardly. ‘I’m afraid so.’

‘You won’t tell me anything about this TARDIS of yours

- Time and Relative Dimensions in Space—that’s what the Doctor said it meant. But you won’t explain it?’

‘Look, it’s like... well, like two different worlds. You have yours, and we have ours.’ Jamie thought of the shock it had been for him to leave his own place and time,

and of how sometimes his heart still ached for his native highlands. He heard the Doctor calling him.

'Look, Zoe,' he said, 'You've been - well, we won't forget you.' He turned and hurried away, leaving Zoe staring after him.

The Doctor meanwhile had been having a very busy time. He had replaced the Time Vector Generator, restoring the TARDIS to its normal size. Normal, for the TARDIS that is, since it was once again bigger on the inside than the outside. Now he was topping up the mercury level once again, pouring the mercury he'd found on the Wheel into the TARDIS console by means of an old tin kitchen funnel. He looked up as Jamie came in.

'All set, Doctor?' asked Jamie.

'Yes, I've even got a little mercury left over.'

'Then we can go?' Jamie seemed to be in a hurry - as if leaving was a wrench and he wanted to get it over with.

Over Jamie's shoulder, the Doctor watched amusedly as Zoe crawled into the TARDIS on her hands and knees, and climbed inside an ornate wooden chest he kept in the control room for its decorative value.

'There's just one little matter to settle first, Jamie,' said the Doctor gently. He went over to the chest and opened the lid. Zoe climbed shamefacedly out.

'Hey, I told you -' began Jamie.

Zoe said firmly. 'I want to go with you!'

'Well, ye canna'. It's impossible.'

'Not impossible, Jamie,' said the Doctor. 'What we have to decide is - is it wise? You might be sorry one day, Zoe, wish you'd changed your mind.'

'I won't.'

The Doctor smiled. 'I wonder.' He opened a panel in the TARDIS console, and took out a kind of headset. He fitted it on and settled himself in a chair. 'Look at that screen up there...'

Jamie was baffled. 'What are you going to do, Doctor?'

'I'm going to show Zoe the sort of thing she might be in for, if she stays.'

Zoe looked at the headset and at the screen. 'Thought patterns, Doctor?'

'Yes. I shall make them into a complete story... Have you ever heard of the Daleks, Zoe?'

'No.'

'Then watch,' said the Doctor impressively.

Shapes began to appear on the screen, squat menacing metallic shapes.

The Daleks...

Jamie realised that the Doctor was telling Zoe the story of one of their recent adventures, the one in which they'd first met poor Victoria.

Jamie wondered if she was happy in her new life. He hoped so. Curiously, he was finding it hard to remember her face - especially with Zoe's vivid little face gazing enthralled at the screen. Jamie noticed something else.

Consciously or unconsciously, the Doctor must have operated the controls before sitting down. The TARDIS doors were closed and the centre column was rising and falling. The TARDIS was already in flight.

Jamie hoped Zoe wouldn't be too scared by the Doctor's Dalek story. Because now, like it or not, she was on her way.